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TALES OF TERROR AND THE MACABRE

THE HAUNT OF HORROR

JUNE 1973

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FEATURING
**CONJURE
WIFE**
BY
FRITZ LEIBER



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THE HAUNT OF HORROR

JUNE 1973



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**THE HAUNT OF
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Editorial

The Unspoken Invitation

THERE'S A CERTAIN TRADITION IN HORROR FICTION. Like many traditions, it's been used so often it trembles on the verge of becoming a cliché . . . if it hasn't already. It goes something like this:

A lonely wind-swept moor. The rattle and wheeze of an ancient automobile lurching along a rutted road; the final cough as the engine dies. Muttered curses, the slam of a car door, the crunch of footsteps on dried earth. Ahead, through the fog, something glows: a light. The footsteps become hurried, and a new sound is added: harsh, eager breathing.

Like a tumble of stones, a dark mansion rises out of the mist. From one of its windows come the light, warm and—inviting.

You know the rest; you've seen it, or read it, a thousand times. It is, as we say, a tradition; cliché is really too harsh a word for such a familiar, friendly sight.

Perhaps it appeals to something basic in human nature. Perhaps the animal in man is still wary of that warm, inviting glow, and knows that no good can come of accepting an unspoken invitation. If so, it reveals man's animal distrust of man.

That's not a very pretty thought.

Let's look at it another way. Often, the stranger answering the beacon will find himself embroiled in the nightmare of another; unlike Jonathan Harkness in *Dracula*, many of the fictional guests know nothing of their hosts before stumbling upon their homes through some "whim of fate." They learn, as the reader learns, the story of the household, and through their experiences in that household, we come to understand some aspect of life which was hidden to us previously—whether it be the true nature of madness, or the motives behind murder—and because of it, we are enlightened. Sometimes such enlightenment brings horror with it: To look upon the face of terror is to be terrified.

So, there's another interpretation to that unspoken invitation: it is, perhaps, an invitation to step beyond the bounds of ordinary human understanding, into a world where normality is the stronger and every man is met by his nightmare twin.

Only the brave—or the foolish—would knowingly accept such an invitation. And certainly, by doing so, they doom themselves to madness.

Certainly.

YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS the first issue of a new magazine called **THE HAUNT OF HORROR**. It's not the first of its kind, though we think it may soon lay claim to being the best; rather, it is part of a long tradition of fictional horror, a tradition that extends back through time to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and forward to the as-yet-unseen fiction of the future. Over the past decades since the publication of *Frankenstein*, many authors have delved into the fiction of horror; among them have been Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, H. Rider Haggard, Mark Twain, Robert E. Howard, August Derleth, George Orwell,

Brom Stoker and A. Merritt. Each has contributed a style and a point of view, and each represents a separate tradition in the field. **THE HAUNT OF HORROR** is designed to continue their traditions, and to establish new traditions, and to do that we've brought together a collection of the most exciting writers working in the horror genre today.

If you're the sort of reader who enjoys the old-time fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and A.A. Merritt, you'll find your kind of story in the writings of John K. Diemede, represented in our premiere issue by "*The First Step*." If you prefer horror without a supernatural touch, then "*Seeing Stingy Ed*" by David R. Bunch, and Beverly Goldberg's "*A Nice Home*", should fill your need. If you like the occult, "*Night Bear*" by Ramsey Campbell, and "*Loup Garou*" by A.A. Attanasio are both masterpieces of the supernatural-style tale.

And if you're a fan of science-fiction, names like Horlon Ellison and R. A. Lofferty might just ring a chord.

In a way, **THE HAUNT OF HORROR** is an experiment. For several years the Marvel Magazine Group has been the leading publisher of comic books on this side of the Atlantic; **THE HAUNT OF HORROR** is our first effort in another field, and admittedly, we're just the littlest bit uneasy. That's one reason we've gone out of our way to pick the best horror stories we could find; it's also the reason why many of our artists are new to the regular readers of digest fiction, as most of them are drawn from the pages of our comic magazines. From Gray Morrow to Mike Ploag, they're all familiar to comic fans; we think you'll agree, their following is richly deserved.

What can you expect from **THE HAUNT OF HORROR** in the future? More stories.

(continued on page 126)



CONJURE WIFE

FRITZ LEIBER

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CHAPTER I

NORMAN SAYLOR was not the sort of man to go prying into his wife's dressing room. That was partly the reason why he did it. He was sure that nothing could touch the security of the relationship between him and Tansy.

He knew, of course, what had happened to Bluebeard's inquisitive wife. In fact, at one time he had gone rather deeply into the psycho-analytic undertones of that strange tale of dangling ladies. But it never occurred to him that any comparable surprise might await a husband, and a modern husband at that. A half-dozen handsome beaux hanging on hooks behind that door which gleamed so creamily? The idea would have given him a chuckle in spite of his scholarly delvings into feminine psychology and those brilliant studies in the parallelisms of primitive superstition and modern neurosis that had already won him a certain professional fame.

He didn't look like a distinguished ethnologist—he was rather too young for one thing—and he certainly didn't look like a professor of sociology at Hempnell College. He quite lacked the pursed lips, frightened eyes, and tyrannical jaw of the typical faculty member of that

CONJURE WIFE

small, proud college.

Nor did he feel at all like a good Hempnell, for which he was particularly grateful today.

Spring sunshine was streaming restfully, and the balmy air sluicing gently, through the window at his elbow. He put in the last staccato burst of typing on his long-deferred paper, "The Social Background of the Modern Voodoo Cult," and pushed himself and his chair away from his desk with a sigh of satisfaction, suddenly conscious of having reached one of those peaks in the endless cycle of happiness and unhappiness when conscience sleeps at last and everything shows its pleasant side. Such a moment as would mark for a neurotic or adolescent the beginning of a swift tumble into abysses of gloom, but which Norman had long ago learned to ride out successfully, introducing new activities at just the right time to cushion the inevitable descent.

But that didn't mean he shouldn't enjoy to the full the moment while it lasted, extract the last drop of dreamy pleasure. He wandered out of his study, flipped open a bright-backed novel, immediately deserted it to let his gaze drift past two Chinese devil-masks on the wall, ambled out past the bedroom door, smiled at the cabinet where the liquor, Hempnell-wise, was "kept in the background"—but without wanting a drink—and retraced his

course as far as the bedroom.

The house was very quiet. There was something comforting this afternoon about its unpretentious size, its over-partitioned stuffiness, even its approaching senility. It seemed to wear bravely its middle-class intellectual trappings of books and prints and record-albums. Today's washable paint covered last century's ornate moldings. Overtones of intellectual freedom and love of living apologized for heavy notes of professorial dignity.

Outside the bedroom window the neighbor's boy was hauling a coaster wagon piled with newspapers. Across the street an old man was spading around some bushes, stepping gingerly over the new grass. A laundry truck rattled past, going toward the college. Norman momentarily knit his brows. Then in the opposite direction, two girl students came sauntering in the trousers and flapping shirt tails forbidden in the classrooms. Norman smiled. He was in a mood to cherish warmly the funny, cold little culture that the street represented, the narrow unamiable culture with its taboos against mentioning reality, its elaborate suppression of sex, its insistence on a stoical ability to withstand a monotonous routine of business or drudgery—and in the midst, performing the necessary rituals to keep dead ideas alive, like a college of witch-doctors in their stern stone tents, powerful,

property-owning Hempnell.

It was odd, he thought, that he and Tansy had been able to stick it out so long and, in the end, so successfully. You couldn't honestly have called either of them the small-college type. Tansy especially, he was sure, had at first found everything nerve-racking: the keen-honed faculty rivalries, the lip-service to all species of respectability, the bland requirement (which would have sent a simple mechanic into spasms) that faculty wives work for the college out of pure loyalty, the elaborate social responsibilities, and the endless chaperoning of resentfully fawning students (for Hempnell was one of those colleges which offer anxious parents an alternative to the un-shepherded freedom of what Norman recalled a local politician having described as "those hotbeds of communism and free love"—the big metropolitan universities).

By all expectations Tansy and he should either have escaped to one of the hotbeds, or started a process of uneasy drifting—a squabble about academic freedom here, a question of salary there—or else tried to become writers or something equally reclusive. But somehow, drawing on an unknown inward source, Tansy had found the strength to fight Hempnell on its own terms, to conform without losing stature, to take more than her share of the social burdens and thereby draw around Norman, as it

were, a magic circle, within which he had been able to carry on his real work, the researches and papers that would ultimately make them independent of Hempnell and what Hempnell thought. And not only ultimately, but soon, for now with Redding's retirement he was assured of the sociology chairmanship, and then it would only be a matter of months until one of the big universities came through with the right offer.

For a moment Norman lost himself in sudden, sharp admiration of his wife, as if he were seeing Tansy's sterling qualities for the first time. Damn it, she had done so much for him, and so unobtrusively. Even to acting as a tireless and efficient secretary on all his researches without once making him feel guilty in his gratefulness. And he had been such unpromising material to start with: a lazy, spottily brilliant young instructor, dangerously contemptuous of academic life, taking a sophomoric pleasure in shocking his staid colleagues, with a suicidal tendency to make major issues out of minor disputes with deans and presidents. Why, there had been a dozen times during the early years when he had teetered on the brink of the academic downgrade, when there had loomed some irreparable break with authority, yet he had always managed to wriggle out, and almost always, he could see, looking back, with Tansy's clever,

roundabout aid. Ever since he had married her, his life had been luck, luck, luck!

How the devil had she managed it?—she, who had been as lazy and wantonly rebellious as himself, a moody, irresponsible girl, daughter of an ineffectual country minister, her childhood lonely and undisciplined, solaced by wild imaginings, with little or nothing of the routinized, middle-class stuffiness that helped so much at Hempnell.

Nevertheless she had managed it, so that now—what a paradox!—he was looked upon as “a good, solid Hempnell man,” “a credit to the college,” “doing big things,” close friend to Dean Gunnison (who wasn’t such a terrible sort himself when you got to know him) and a man on whom platitudinous President Pollard “depended,” a tower of strength compared to his nervous, rabbit-brained department colleague Hervey Sawtelle. From being one of the iconoclasts, he had become one of the plaster images, and yet (and this was the really wonderful thing) without once compromising his serious ideals, without once knuckling under to reactionary rulings.

Now, in his reflective, sun-brightened mood, it seemed to Norman that there was something incredible about his success at Hempnell, something magical and frightening, as if he and Tansy were a young warrior and squaw

who had blundered into a realm of ancestral ghosts and had managed to convince those grim phantoms that they too were properly buried tribal elders, fit to share the supernatural rulership; always managing to keep secret their true flesh-and-blood nature despite a thousand threatened disclosures, because Tansy happened to know the right protective charms. Of course, when you came down to it, it was just that they were both mature and realistic. Everybody had to get over that age-old hump, learn to control the childish ego or else have his life wrecked by it. Still . . .

THE SUNLIGHT BRIGHTENED a trifle, became a shade more golden, as if some cosmic electrician had advanced the switch another notch. At the same moment one of the two shirt-tailed girls, disappearing around the corner of the house next door, laughed happily. Norman turned back from the window and as he did, Totem the cat rose from her sun-warmed spot on the silk comforter and indulged in a titanic yawn-and-stretch that looked as if it surely would dislocate every bone in her handsome body. Grateful for the example, Norman copied her, in moderation. Oh, it was a wonderfully day all right, one of those days when reality becomes a succession of such bright and sharp images that you are afraid that any moment you will poke a hole in the

gorgeous screen and glimpse the illimitable, unknown blackness it films; when everthing seems so friendly and right that you tremble lest a sudden, searing flash of insight reveal to you the massed horror and hate and brutality and ignorance on which life rests.

As Norman finished his yawn, he became aware that his blissful mood had still a few moments to run.

At the same instant his gaze happened to swing to the door of Tansy's dressing room.

He was conscious of wanting to do one more thing before he buckled down to work or recreation, something completely idle and aimless, a shade out of character, perhaps even a little childish and reprehensible, so he could be amusedly ashamed afterwards.

Of course, if Tansy had been there . . . but since she wasn't, her dressing room might serve as a proxy of her amiable self.

The door stood enticingly ajar, revealing the edge of a fragile chair with a discarded slip trailing down from it and a feathery-toed mule peeking from under. Beyond the chair was a jar-strewn section of ivory table-top, pleasantly dusky—for it was a windowless small cubicle, hardly more than a large closet.

He had never in his life spied on Tansy or seriously thought of doing so, any more than, so far as he

knew, she had on him. It was one of those things they had taken for granted as a fundamental of marriage.

But this thing he was tempted toward couldn't be called spying. It was more like a gesture of illicit love, in any case a trifling transgression.

Besides, no human being has the right to consider himself perfect, or even completely adult, to bottle up all naughty urges.

Moreover, he had carried away from the sunny window a certain preoccupation with the riddle of Tansy, the secret of her ability to withstand and best the strangling atmosphere of catclawed Hempnell. Hardly a riddle, of course, and certainly not one to which you could hope to find the answer in her boudoir. Still . . .

He hesitated.

Totem, her white paws curled neatly under her black waistcoat, watched him.

He walked into Tansy's dressing room.

Totem sprang down from the bed and padded after him.

He switched on the rose-shaded lamp and surveyed the rack of dresses, the shelves of shoes. There was a slight disorder, very sane and lovable. A faint perfume conjured up agreeable memories.

He studied the photographs on the wall around the mirror. One of Tansy and himself in partial Indian costume, from three summers back

when he had been studying the Yumas. They both looked solemn, as if trying very seriously to be good Indians. Another, rather faded, showed them in 1928 bathing suits, standing on an old pier smiling squintily with the sun in their eyes. That took him back east to Bayport, the summer before they were married. A third showed an uproarious Negro baptism in midriver. That was when he had held the Hazelton Fellowship and been gathering materials for his *Social Patterns of the Southern Negro* and later "Feminine Element in Superstition." Tansy had been invaluable to him that busy half-year when he had hammered out the ground-work of a reputation. She had accompanied him in the field, writing down the vivid, rambling recollections of ancient, bright-eyed men and women who remembered the slave days because they themselves had been slaves. He recalled how slight and boyish and intense whe'd seemed, even a little gauche, that summer when they'd just left Gorham College before coming to Hempnell. She'd certainly gained remarkably in poise since then.

The fourth picture showed an old Negro conjure doctor with wrinkled face and proud high forehead under a battered slouch hat. He stood with shoulders back and eyes quietly flaring, as if surveying the whole dirty-pink culture and rejecting it because he had a deeper and

stronger knowledge of his own. Ostrich plumes and scarified cheeks couldn't have made him look any more impressive. Norman remembered the fellow well—he had been one of their more valuable and also more difficult informants, requiring several visits before the notebook had been satisfied.

He looked down at the dressing table and the ample array of cosmetics. Tansy had been the first of the Hempnell faculty wives to use lipstick and lacquer her nails. There had been veiled criticism and some talk of "the example we set our students," but she had stuck it out until Hulda Gunnison had appeared at the Faculty Frolic with what astronomically intense observation revealed was a careless but unmistakable crimson smear on her mouth. Then all had been well.

Flanked by cold cream jars was a small photograph of himself, with a little pile of small change, all dimes and quarters, in front of it.

He roused himself. This wasn't the vaguely illegitimate spying he had intended. He pulled out a drawer at random, hastily scanned the pile of rolled-up stockings that filled it, shut it, took hold of the ivory knob of the next.

And paused.

This was rather silly, it occurred to him. Simultaneously he realized that he had just squeezed the last drop from the peak of his mood. As when he had turned from the win-

dow, but more ominously, the moment seemed to freeze, as if all reality, every bit of it he lived to this moment, were something revealed by a lightning flash that would the next instant blink out, leaving inky darkness. That rather common buzzing-in-the-ears, everything-too-real sensation.

From the doorway Totem looked up at him.

But sillier still to analyze a trifling whim, as if it could mean anything one way or the other.

To show it didn't, he'd look in one more drawer.

It jammed, so he gave it a sharp tug before it jerked free.

A large cardboard box toward the back caught his eye. He edged up the cover and took out one of the tiny glass-stoppered bottles that filled it. What sort of a cosmetic would this be? Too dark for face powder. More like a geologist's soil specimen. An ingredient for a mud pack? Hardly. Tansy had a herb garden. Could that be involved?

The dry, dark-brown granules shifted smoothly, like sand in an hourglass, as he rotated the glass cylinder. The label appeared, in Tansy's clear script. "Julia Trock, Roseland." He couldn't recall any Julia Trock. And why should the name Roseland seem distasteful? His hand knocked aside the cardboard cover as he reached for a second bottle, identical with the first, except that the contents had a somewhat reddish tinge and the

label read, "Phillip Lassiter, Hill." A third, contents same color as the first: "J.P. Thorndyke, Roseland." Then a handful quickly snatch up: "Emelyn Scatterday, Roseland." "Mortimer Pope, Hill." "The Rev. Bufort Ames, Roseland." They were, respectively, brown, reddish, and brown.

The silence in the house grew thunderous; even the sunlight in the bedroom seemed to sizzle and fry, as his mind rose to a sudden pitch of concentration on the puzzle. "Roseland and Hill, Roseland and Hill, Oh we went to Roseland and Hill,"—like a nursery rhyme somehow turned nasty, making the glass cylinders repugnant to his fingers, "—but we never came back."

Abruptly the answer came.

The two local cemeteries.

Graveyard dirt.

Soil specimens all right. Graveyard dirt from particular graves. A chief ingredient of Negro conjure magic.

With a soft thud Totem landed on the table and began to sniff inquisitively at the bottles, springing away as Norman plunged his hand into the drawer. He felt smaller boxes behind the big one, yanked suddenly at the whole drawer, so it fell to the floor. In one of the boxes were bent, rusty, worn bits of iron—horseshoe nails. In the other were calling-card envelopes, filled with snippings of hair, each labeled like the bottles. But he

knew most of these names—"Hervey Sawtelle . . . Gracine Pollard . . . Hulda Gunnison . . ." And in one labeled "Evelyn Sawtelle"—red-lacquered nail clippings.

In the third drawer he drew blank. But the fourth yielded a varied harvest. Packets of small dried leaves and powdered vegetable matter—so that was what came from Tansy's herb garden along with kitchen seasonings? Vervain, vinmoin, devil's stuff, the labels said. Bits of lodestone with iron filings clinging to them. Goose quills which spilled quicksilver when he shook them. Small squares of flannel, the sort that Negro conjure doctors use for their "tricken bags" or "hands." A box of old silver coins and silver filings—strong protective magic; giving significance to the silver coins in front of his photograph.

But Tansy was so sane, so healthily contemptuous of palmistry, astrology, numerology and all other superstitious fads. A hardheaded New Englander. So well versed, from her work with him, in the psychological background of superstition and primitive magic. So well versed—

He found himself thumbing through a dog-eared copy of his own *Parrallelisms in Superstition and Neurosis*. It looked like the one he had lost around the house—was it eight years ago? Beside a formula for conjuration was a marginal

notation in Tansy's script: "Doesn't work. Substitute copper filings for brass. Try in dark of moon instead of full."

"Norman—"

Tansy was standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER II

IT IS THE PEOPLE WE KNOW BEST who can, on rare occasions, seem most unreal to us. For a moment the familiar face registers as merely an arbitrary arrangement of colored surfaces, without even the shadowy personality with which we invest a strange face glimpsed in the street.

Norman Saylor felt he wasn't looking at his wife, but at a painting of her. It was as if some wizardly Renoir or Toulouse-Lautrec had painted Tansy with the air for a canvas—boldly blocked in the flat cheeks in pale flesh tones faintly undertinged with green, drew them together to a small defiant chin; smudged crosswise with careless art the red thoughtful lips, the gray-green maybe humorous eyes, the narrow low-arched brows with single vertical furrow between; created with one black stroke the childishy sinister bangs, swiftly smeared the areas of shadowed white throat and wine-colored dress; caught perfectly the feel of the elbow that hugged a package from the dressmaker's, as the small ugly hands lifted to

remove a tiny hat that was another patch of the wine color with a highlight representing a little doodad of silvered glass.

If he were to reach out and touch her, Norman felt, the paint would peel down in strips from the empty air, as from some walking sister-picture of Dorian Gray.

He stood stupidly staring at her, the open book in his hand. He didn't hear himself say anything, though he knew that if words had come to his lips at that moment, his voice would have sounded to him like another's—some fool professor's.

Then, without saying anything either, and without any noticeable change of expression, Tansy turned on her heel and walked rapidly out of the bedroom. The package from the dressmaker's fell to the floor. It was a moment before Norman could stir himself.

He caught up with her in the living room. She was headed for the front door. When he realized she wasn't going to turn or stop, he threw his arms around her. And then, at last, she did react. She struggled like an animal, but with her face turned sharply away and her arms flat against her sides, as if tied there.

Through taut mouth-slit, in a very low voice, but spittingly, she said, "Don't touch me."

Norman strained and braced his feet. There was something horrible about the way she threw herself

from side to side, trying to break his embrace. There flickered in his mind the thought of a woman in a straitjacket.

She kept repeating "Don't touch me" in the same tones, and he kept imploring, "But Tansy—"

Suddenly she stopped struggling. He dropped his arms and stepped back.

She didn't relax. She just stood there rigidly, her face twisted to one side—and from what he could see of it, the eyes were winced shut and the lips bitten together. Some kindred tightness, inside him, hurt his heart.

"Darling!" he said. "I'm ashamed of what I did. No matter what it led to it was a cheap, underhanded, unworthy action. But—"

"It's not that!"

He hesitated. "You mean, you're acting this way because you're, well, ashamed of what I found out?"

No reply.

"Please, Tansy, we've got to talk about it."

Still no reply. He unhappily fingered the air. "But I'm sure everything will be all right. If you'll just tell me . . ."

"Tansy, please . . ."

Her posture didn't alter, but her lips arched and the words were spat out: "Why don't you strap me and stick pins in me? They used to do that."

"Darling, I'd do anything rather

'than hurt you! But this is something that just has to be talked about."

"I can't. If you say another word about it, I'll scream!"

"Darling, if I possibly could, I'd stop. But this is one of those things. We've just got to talk it over."

"I'd rather die."

"But you've got to tell me. You've got to!"

He was shouting.

For a moment he thought she was going to faint. He reached forward to catch her. But it was only that her body had abruptly gone slack. She walked over to the nearest chair, dropped her hat on a small table beside it, sat down listlessly.

"All right," she said. "Let's talk about it."

6:37 P.M.: The last rays of sunlight sliced the bookcase, touched the red teeth of the left-hand devil mask. Tansy was sitting on one end of the davenport, while Norman was at the other, turned sideways with one knee on the cushion, watching her.

Tansy switched around, flirting her head irritably, as if there were in the air a smoke of words which had grown unendurable thick. "All right, have it your own way then! I was seriously trying to use conjure magic. I was doing everything a civilized woman shouldn't. I was trying to put spells on people and things. I was trying to change the future. I was . . . oh, the whole

works!"

Norman gave a small jerky nod. It was the same sort of nod he gave at student conferences, when after seeming hours of muddled discussion, some blank-faced young hopeful would begin to get a glimmering of what they were really talking about. He leaned toward her.

"But why?"

"To protect you and your career." She was looking at her lap.

"But knowing all you did about the background of superstition, how did you ever come to believe—?" His voice wasn't loud now. It was cool, almost a lawyer's.

She twisted. "I don't know. When you put it that way . . . of course. But when you desperately want things to happen, or not to happen, to someone you love . . . I was only doing what millions of others have done. And then, you see, Norm, the things I did . . . well, they seemed to work . . . at least most of the time.

"But don't you see," he continued smoothly, "that those very exceptions prove that the things you were doing *didn't* work? That the successes were just coincidences?"

Her voice rose a trifle. "I don't know about that. There might have been counter-influences at work—" She turned toward him impulsively. "Oh, I don't know what I believe! I've never really been sure that my charms worked.



There was no way of telling. Don't you see, once I'd started, I didn't dare stop?"

"And you've been doing it all these years?"

She nodded unhappily. "Ever since we came to Hempnell."

HE LOOKED AT HER, trying to comprehend it. It was almost impossible to take at one gulp the realization that in the mind of this trim modern creature he had known in completest intimacy, there was a whole great area he had never dreamed of, an area that was part and parcel of the dead practices he analyzed in books, an area that belonged to the Stone Age and never to him, an area plunged in darkness, acrouch with fear, blown by giant winds. He tried to picture Tansy muttering charms, stitching up flannel hands by candlelight, visiting graveyards and God knows what other places in search of ingredients. His imagination almost failed. And yet it had all been happening right under his nose.

The only faintly suspicious aspect of Tansy's behavior that he could recall was her whim for taking "little walks" by herself. If he had ever wondered about Tansy and superstitions at all, it had only been to decide, with a touch of self-congratulation, that for a woman she was almost oddly free from irrationality.

"Oh, Norm, I'm so confused and miserable," she broke in. "I don't

know what to say or how to start."

He had an answer for that, a scholar's answer.

"Tell me how it all happened, right from the beginning."

7:54: They were still sitting on the davenport. The room was almost dark. The devil masks were irregular ovals of gloom. Tansy's face was a pale smudge. Norman couldn't study its expression, but judging from her voice, it had become animated.

"Hold on a minute," he interrupted. "Let's get some things straight. You say you were very much afraid when we first came to Hempnell to arrange about my job, before I went south on the Hazelton Fellowship?"

"Oh, yes, Norm. Hempnell terrified me. Everyone was so obviously antagonistic and so deadly respectable. I knew I'd be a flop as a professor's wife—I was practically told so to my face. I don't know which was worse, Hulda Gunnison looking me up and down and grunting contemptuously, 'I guess you'll do,' when I made the mistake of confiding in her, or old Mrs. Carr petting my arm and saying, 'I know you and your husband will be very happy here at Hempnell. You're young, but Hempnell loves nice young folks!' Against those women I felt completely unprotected. And your career too."

"Right. So when I took you south and plunged you into the midst of the most superstition-swayed area

in the whole country, exposed you to the stuff night and day, you were ripe for its promise of magical security."

Tansy laughed half-heartedly. "I don't know about the ripe part, but it certainly impressed me. I drank in all I could. At the back of my mind, I suppose, was the feeling: Some day I may need this. And when we went back to Hempnell in the fall, I felt more confident."

Norman nodded. That fitted. Come to think of it, there had been something unnatural about the intense, silent enthusiasm with which Tansy had plunged into boring secretarial work right after their marriage.

"But you didn't actually try and conjure magic," he continued, "until I got pneumonia that first winter?"

"That's right. Until then, it was just a cloud of vaguely reassuring ideas—scraps of things I'd find myself saying over when I woke in the middle of the night, things I'd unconsciously avoid doing because they were unlucky, like sweeping the steps after dark or crossing knives and forks. And then when you got pneumonia, well, when the person you love is near death, you'll try anything."

For a moment Norman's voice was sympathetic. "Of course." Then the classroom tone came back. "But I gather that it wasn't until I had that brush with Pollard over sex education and came off

decently, and especially until my book came out in 1931 and got such, well, pretty favorable reviews, that you really began to believe that your magic was working?"

"That's right."

Norman sat back. "Oh, Lord," he said.

"What's the matter, dear? You don't feel I'm trying to take any credit away from you for the book's success?"

Norman half laughed, half snorted. "Good Lord, no. But—" He stopped himself. "Well, that takes us to 1930. Go on from there."

8:58: Norman reached over and switched on the light, winced at its glare. Tansy ducked her head.

He stood up, massaging the back of his neck.

"The thing that gets me," he said, "is the way it invaded every nook and corner of your life, bit by bit, so that finally you couldn't take a step, or rather let me take one, without there having to be some protective charm. It's almost like—" He was going to say, "some kinds of paranoia."

Tansy's voice was hoarse and whispery. "I even wear hooks-and-eyes instead of zippers because the hooks are supposed to catch evil spirits. And the mirror-decorations on my hats and bags and dresses—you've guessed it, they're Tibetan magic to reflect away misfortune."

He stood in front of her. "Look, Tansy, whatever made you do it?"

"I've just told you."

"I know, but what made you stick to it year after year, when as you've admitted, you always suspected you were just fooling yourself? I could understand it with another woman, hut with you . . ."

Tansy hesitated. "I know you'll think I'm being romantic and trite, but I've always felt that women were more primitive than men, closer to ancient feelings." She hurried over that. "And then there were things I remembered from childhood. Queer mistaken ideas I got from my father's sermons. Stories one of the old ladies there used to tell us. Hints." (Norman thought: Country parsonage! Healthy mental atmosphere, not!) "And then—oh, there were a thousand other things. But I'll try to tell them to you."

"Swell," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "But we'd better eat something along with it."

9:17: They were sitting facing each other in the jolly red-and-white kitchen. On the table were untasted sandwiches and half-sipped cups of black coffee. It was obvious that the situation between them had changed. Now it was Norman who looked away and Tansy who studied expressions anxiously.

"Well, Norman," she managed to say finally, "do you think I'm crazy, or going crazy?"

It was just the question he had needed. "No, I don't," he said levelly. "Though Lord only knows what an outsider would think if he found out what you'd been doing. But just as surely as you aren't crazy, you are neurotic—like all of us—and your neurosis has taken a darned unusual form."

Suddenly aware of hunger, he picked up a sandwich and began to munch it as he talked, nibbling the edge all around and then beginning to work in.

"Look, all of us have private rituals—our own little peculiar ways of eating and drinking and sleeping and going to the bathroom. Rituals we're hardly conscious of, but that would look mighty strange if analyzed. You know, to step or not to step on cracks in the sidewalk. Things like that. Now I'd say that your private rituals, because of the special circumstances of your life, have gotten all tangled up with conjure magic, so you can hardly tell which is which." He paused. "Now here's an important thing. So long as only *you* knew what you were doing, you didn't tend to criticize your entanglement with conjure magic any more than the average person criticizes his magic formula for going to sleep. There was no social conflict."

HE STARTED TO PACE, still eating the sandwich.

"Good Lord, haven't I devoted a

good part of my life to investigating how and why men and women are superstitious? And shouldn't I have been aware of the contagious effect of that study on you? And what is superstition, but misguided, unobjective science? And when it comes down to that, is it to be wondered if people grasp at superstition in this rotten, hate-filled, half-doomed world of today? Lord knows, I'd welcome the blackest of black magic, if it could do anything to stave off the atom bomb."

Tansy had risen. Her eyes looked unnaturally large and bright.

"Then," she faltered, "you honestly don't hate me, or think I'm going crazy?"

He put his arms around her. "Hell, no!"

She began to cry.

9:33: They were sitting on the davenport again. Tansy had stopped crying, but her head still rested against his shoulder.

For a while they were quiet. Then Norman spoke. He used the deceptively mild tones of a doctor telling a patient that another operation will be necessary.

"Of course, you'll have to quit doing it now."

Tansy sat up quickly. "Oh, no, Norm, I couldn't."

"Why not? You've just agreed it was all nonsense. You've just thanked me for opening your eyes."

"I know that, but still—don't make me, Norm!"

"Now be reasonable, Tansy," he said. "You've taken this like a major so far. I'm proud of you. But don't you see, you can't stop half way. Once you've started to face this weakness of yours logically, you've got to keep on. You've got to get rid of all that stuff in your dressing room, all the charms you've hidden around, everything."

She shook her head. "Don't make me, Norm," she repeated. "Not all at once. I'd feel naked."

"No you won't. You'll feel stronger. Because you'll find out that what you half thought might be magic, is really your own unaided ability."

"No, Norm. Why do I have to stop? What difference does it make? You said yourself it was just nonsense—a private ritual."

"But now that I know about it, it's not private anymore. And in any case," he added, almost dangerously, "it's a pretty unusual ritual."

"But couldn't I just quit by degrees?" She pleaded, like a child. "You know, not lay any new charms, but leave the old ones?"

He shook his head. "No," he said, "it's like giving up drink—it has to be a clean break."

Her voice began to rise. "But, Norm, I can't do it. I simply can't!"

He began to feel she was a child. "Tansy, you must."

"But there wasn't ever anything bad about my magic." The

childishness was getting frightening. "I never used it to hurt anyone or to ask for unreasonable things, like making you president of Hempnell overnight. I only wanted to protect you."

"Tansy, what difference does that make!"

Her breasts were heaving. "I tell you, Norm, I won't be responsible for what happens to you if you make me take away those protections."

"Tansy, be reasonable. What on earth do I need with protections of that sort?"

"Oh, so you think that everything you've won in life is just the result of your own unaided abilities? You don't recognize the luck in it?"

Norman remembered thinking the same thing himself this afternoon and that made him angrier. "Now Tansy—"

"And you think that everyone loves you and wishes you well, don't you? You think all those beasts over at Hempnell are just a lot of pussies with their claws clipped? You pass off their spite and jealousies as something trivial, beneath your notice. Well, let me tell you—"

"Tansy, stop screaming!"

"—that there are those at Hempnell who would like to see you dead—and who would have seen you dead a long time ago, if they could have worked it!"

"Tansy!"

"What do you suppose Evelyn Sawtelle feels toward you for the way you're nosing out her flutter-budget of a husband for the sociology chairmanship? Do you think she wants to bake you a cake? One of her cherry-chocolate ones? How do you suppose Hulda Gunnison likes the influence you have acquired over her husband? It's mainly because of you that she no longer runs the Dean of Men's office. And as for that libidinous old bitch Mrs. Carr, do you imagine that she enjoys the way your freedom-and-frankness policy with the students is cutting into her holier-than-thou respectability, her 'Sex is just an ugly word' stuff? What do you think those women have been doing for *their* husbands?"

"Oh, Lord, Tansy, why drag in that old faculty jealousies business?"

"Do you suppose they'd stop at mere protection? Do you imagine women like that would observe any distinction between white magic and black?"

"Tansy! You don't know what you're saying. If you mean to imply—Tansy, when you talk that way, you actually sound like a witch."

"Oh, I do?" For a moment her expression was so tight her face looked all skull. "Well, maybe I am. And maybe it's lucky for you I've been one."

He grabbed her by the arm.

"Listen, I've been patient with you about all this ignorant nonsense. But now you're going to show some sense and show it quick."

Her lips curled, nastily. "Oh, I see. It's been the velvet glove so far, but now it's going to be the iron hand. If I don't do just as you say, I get packed off to an asylum. Is that it?"

"Of course not! But you've just got to be sensible."

"Well, I tell you I won't!"

"Now, Tansy—"

10:13: The folded comforter jounced as Tansy flopped on the bed. New tears had streaked and reddened her face and dried. "All right," she said, in a stuffy voice. "I'll do what you want. I'll burn all my things."

Norman felt light-headed. The thought came into his mind, "And to think I dared to tackle it without a psychiatrist!"

"There've been enough times when I've wanted to stop," she added. "Just like there've been times I've wanted to stop being a woman."

What followed struck Norman as weirdly anticlimactic. First the ransacking of Tansy's dressing room for hidden charms and paraphernalia. Norman found himself remembering those old two-reel comedies in which scores of people pile out of a taxi-cab—it seemed impossible that a few shallow drawers and old shoe boxes could hold so many wastepaper baskets of

junk. He tossed the dog-eared copy of "Parallelisms" on top of the last one, picked up Tansy's leather-bound diary. She shook her head reassuringly. After the barest hesitation he put it back unopened.

Then the rest of the house. Tansy moving faster and faster, darting from room to room, deftly recovering lannel-wrapped "hands" from the upholstery of the chairs, the under sides of table tops, the interior of vases, until Norman dizzily marveled that he had live in the house for more than ten years without chancing on any.

"It's rather like a treasure hunt, isn't it?" she said with a rueful smile.

There were other charms outside—under front and back doorsteps, in the garage, and in the car. With every handful thrown on the roaring fire he had built in the living room, Norman's sense of relief grew. Finally Tansy opened the seams of the pillows on his bed and carefully fished out two little matted shapes made of feathers bound with fine thread so that they had blended with the fluffy contents of the pillow.

"See, one's a heart, the other an anchor. That's for security," she told him. "New Orleans feather magic. You haven't taken a step for years without being in the range of one of my protective charms."

The feather figures puffed into flame.

"There," she said. "Feel any

reaction?"

"No," he said. "Any reason I should?"

She shook her head. "Except that those were the last ones. And so, if there *were* any hostile forces that my charms were keeping at bay. . ."

He laughed tolerantly. Then for a moment his voice grew hard. "You're sure they're all gone? Absolutely certain you haven't overlooked any?"

"Absolutely certain. There's not one left in the house or near it, Norm—and I never planted any anywhere else because I was afraid of . . . well, interference. I've counted them all over in my mind a dozen times and they've all gone—" She looked at the fire, "—pouf. And now," she said quietly, "I'm tired, really tired. I want to go straight to bed."

Suddenly she began to laugh. "Oh, but first I'll have to stitch up those pillows, or else there'll be feathers all over the place."

He put his arms around her. "Everything okay now?"

"Yes, darling. There's only one thing I want to ask you—that we don't talk about this for a few days at least. Not even mention it. I don't think I could . . . Will you promise me that, Norm?"

He pulled her closer. "Absolutely, dear, Absolutely."

CHAPTER III

LEANING FORWARD from

the worn leather edge of the old easy chair, Norman played with the remnants of the fire, tapped the fang of the poker against a glowing board until it collapsed into tinkling embers, over which swayed almost invisible blue flames.

From the floor beside him Totem watched the flames, head between outstretched paws.

Norman felt tired. He really ought to have followed Tansy to bed long ago, except he wanted time for his thoughts to unkink. Rather a bother, this professional need to assimilate each new situation, to pick over its details mentally, turning them this way and that, until they became quite shopworn. Whereas Tansy had turned out her thoughts like a light and plunged into sleep. How like Tansy!—or perhaps it was just the more finely attuned, hyperthyroid female physiology.

In any case, she'd done the practical, sensible thing. And that was like Tansy, too. Always fair. Always willing, in the long run, to listen to logic (in a similar situation would he have dared try reasoned argument on any other woman?). Always . . . yes . . . empirical. Except that she had gotten off on a crazy sidetrack.

Hempnell was responsible for that, it was a breeding place for neurosis, and being a faculty wife put a woman in one of the worst spots. He ought to have realized years ago the strain she was under

and taken steps. But she'd been too good an actor for him. And he was always forgetting just how deadly seriously women took faculty intrigues. They couldn't escape like their husbands into the cool, measured worlds of mathematics, microbiology or what have you.

Norman smiled. That had been an odd notion Tansy had let slip toward the end—that Evelyn Sawtelle and Harold Gunnison's wife and old Mrs. Carr were practically magic too, of the venomous black variety. And not any too hard to believe, either, if you knew them! That was the sort of idea with which a clever satirical writer could do a lot. Just carry it a step further—picture most women as glamor-conscious witches, carrying on their savage warfare of deathspell and countercharm, while their reality-befuddled husbands went blithely about their business. Let's see, Barrie had written *What Every Woman Knows* to show that men never realize how their wives were responsible for their successes. Being that blind, would men be any more apt to realize that their wives used witchcraft for the purpose?

Norm's smile changed to a wince. He had just remembered that it wasn't just an odd notion, but that Tansy had actually believed, or half-believed, such things. He sucked his lips wryly. Doubtless he'd have more unplea-

sant moments like this, when memory would catch him up with a start. After tonight, it was inevitable.

Still, the worst was over.

He reached down to stroke Totem, who did not look away from the hypnotic embers.

"Time we got to bed, old cat. Must be about twelve. No—quarter past one."

As he slipped the watch back into his pocket, the fingers of his left hand went to the locket at the other end of the chain.

He weighed in his palm the small golden heart, a gift from Tansy. Was it perhaps a trifle heavier than it's metal shell could account for? He snapped up the cover with his thumbnail. There was no regular way of getting at the space behind Tansy's picture, so after a moment's hesitation, he carefully edged out the tiny photograph with a pencil point.

Behind the photograph was a tiny packet wrapped in the finest flannel.

Just like a woman—that thought came with vicious swiftness—to seem to give in completely, but to hold out on something.

Perhaps she had forgotten.

Angrily he tossed the packet into the fireplace. The photograph fluttered along with it, lighted on the bed of embers, and flared before he could snatch it out. He had a glimpse of Tansy's face curling and blackening.



The packet took longer. A yellow glow crept across its surface, as the nap singed. Then a wavering four-inch flame shot up.

Simultaneously, a chill went through him, though he still felt the heat from the embers. The room seemed to darken. There was a faint, mighty roaring in his ears, as of motors far underground. He had the sense of standing suddenly naked and unarmed before something menacingly alien.

Totem had turned around and was peering intently at the shadows in the far corner. With a spitting hiss she sprang sideways and darted from the room.

Norman realized he was trembling. Nervous reaction, he told himself. Might have known it was overdue.

The flame died, and once again there was only the frostily tinkling bed of embers.

Explosively, the phone began to jangle.

"Professor Saylor? I don't suppose you ever thought you'd hear from me again, did you? Well, the reason I'm calling you is that I always believe in letting people—no matter who—know where I stand, which is a lot more than can be said for some people."

Norman held the receiver away from his ear. The words, though jumbled, sounded like the beginning of a call, but the tone in which they were uttered didn't. Surely it would take half an hour of ranting

before anyone could reach such a pitch of whining and—yes, the word was applicable—insane anger.

"What I want to tell you, Saylor, is this: I'm not going to take what's been done to me lying down. I'm not going to let myself stay flunked out of Hempnell. I'm going to demand to have my grades changed and you know why!"

Norman recognized the voice. There sprang into his mind the image of a pale, abnormally narrow face with pouting lips and protuberant eyes, crowned by a great shock of red hair. He cut in.

"Now listen, Jennings, if you thought you were being treated unfairly, why didn't you present your grievances two months ago, when you got your grades?"

"Why? Because I let you pull the wool over my eyes. The open-minded Professor Saylor! It wasn't until afterwards that I realized how you hadn't given me the proper attention, how I'd been slighted or bamboozled at conferences, how you didn't tell me I might flunk until it was too late, how you based your test on trick questions from lectures I'd missed, how you discriminated against me because of my father's politics and because I wasn't the student type like that Bronstein. It wasn't until then—"

"Jennings, be reasonable. You flunked two courses besides mine last semester."

"Yes, because you passed the

word around, influenced others against me, made them see me as you pretended to see me, made everyone—"

"And you mean to tell me you only now realized all this?"

"Yes I do. It just came to me in a flash as I was thinking here. Oh, you were clever, all right. You had me eating out of your hand, you had me taking everything lying down, you had me scared. But once I got my first suspicion, I saw the whole plot clear as day. Everything fitted, everything led back to you, everything—"

"Including the fact that you were flunked out of two other colleges before you ever came to Hempnell?"

"There! I knew you were prejudiced against me from the start!"

"Jennings," Norman said wearily. "I've listened to all I'm going to. If you have any grievances, present them to Dean Gunnison."

"Do you mean to say you won't take any action?"

"Yes, I mean just that."

"Is that final?"

"Yes, it's final."

"Very well, Saylor. Then all I can say to you is, watch out! Watch out, Saylor. Watch out!"

THERE WAS A CLICK at the other end of the line. Norman gently put the phone back in its cradle. Oh, damn Theodore Jennings' parents! Not because they were hypocritical, vain, reactionary

stuffed-shirts, but because they had such cruel pride that they were determined to shove through college a sensitive, selfish, wordy, somewhat sub-normal boy, as narrow-minded as they were though not one-tenth as canny. And damn President Pollard for kow-towing so ineptly to their wealth and political influence that he had let the boy into Hempnell knowing perfectly well he'd fail.

Norman put the screen in front of the fire, switched out the living room lights and started toward the bedroom in the yellow glow fanning out from the hall.

Again the phone jangled. Norman looked at it curiously for a moment before he picked it up.

"Hello."

There was no reply. He waited for a few moments. Then, "Hello?" he repeated.

Still there was no reply. He was about to hang up when he thought he caught the sound of breathing—excited, uneven, choked.

"Who is it?" he said sharply. "This is Professor Saylor. Please speak up."

He still seemed to hear the breathing. That was all.

Then out of the small back mystery of the phone came one word, enunciated slowly and with difficulty, in a voice that was deep yet throbbed with an almost fantastic intimacy.

"Darling!"

Norman swallowed. He didn't seem to recognize this voice at all. Before he could think what to say, it went on, more swiftly, but otherwise unchanged.

"Oh, Norman, how glad I am that at last I've found the courage to speak where you wouldn't. I'm ready now, darling, I'm ready. You only need to come to me."

"Really?" Norman temporized in amazement. It seemed to him now that there was something faintly familiar about the voice, not in its tone, but in its phrasing and rhythm.

"Come to me, lover, come to me. Take me to some place where we'll be alone. All alone. I'll be your mistress. I'll be your slave. Subject me to you. Do anything you want to me."

Norman wanted to laugh uproariously, yet his heart was pounding a little. Nice, perhaps, if it were real, but there was something so clownish about it. Was it a joke? he suddenly asked himself.

"I'm lying here talking to you without any clothes on, darling. There's just a tiny pink lamp by the bed. Oh, take me to some lonely tropical isle and we'll make passionate love together. I'll hurt you and you'll hurt me. And then we'll swim in the moonlight with white petals drifting down onto the water."

Yes, it was a joke all right, it just had to be, he decided with a twinge of only half-humorous regret. And

then there suddenly occurred to him the one person capable of playing such a joke.

"So come, Norman, come, and take me into the darkness," the voice continued.

"All right, I will," he replied briskly. "And after I've made passionate love to you I'll switch on the light and I'll say, 'Mona Utell, aren't you ashamed of yourself?'"

"Mona?" The voice rose in pitch. "Mona?"

"Yes indeed, Mona!" he assured her laughingly. "You're the only actress I know, in fact the only woman I know, who could do that corny sultriness to such perfection. What would you have done if Tansy had answered? An imitation of Humphrey Bogart? How's New York? How's the party? What are you drinking?"

"Drinking? Norman, don't you know who this is?"

"Certainly. You're Mona Utell." But he had already grown doubtful. Long-drawn-out jokes weren't Mona's specialty. And the strange voice, with its aura of exasperating familiarity, was growing higher all the time.

"You really don't know who I am?"

"No, I guess I don't," he replied, speaking a little sharply because that was the way the question had been put.

"Not really?"

Norman sensed that those two words cocked the trigger for an

emotional explosion, but he didn't care. He went ahead and pulled it. "No!" he said impatiently.

At that the voice at the other end of the wire rose to a scream. Totem, slinking past, turned her head at the sound.

"You beast! You dirty beast! After all you've done to me! After you've deliberately roused me. After you've undressed me a hundred times with your eyes!"

"Now please—"

"Corny sultriness! You . . . you lousy schoolteacher! Go back to your Mona! Go back to that snippy wife of yours. And I hope you all three fry in hell!"

Once again Norman found himself listening to a dead phone. With a wry smile he put it down. Oh, the staid life of a college professor! He tried to think of some woman who could possibly be entertaining a secret passion for him, but that didn't lead him anywhere. Certainly his idea about Mona Utell had seemed a good one at the time. She was quite capable of calling them up long distance from New York for a joke. It was just the sort of thing she'd do to enliven a party after the evening performance.

But not to end the joke that way. Mona always wanted you laughing with her at the finish.

Perhaps someone else had been playing a joke.

Or perhaps someone else really . . . He shrugged his shoulders.

Such an asinine business. He must tell Tansy. It would amuse her. He started toward the bedroom.

Only then did he remember all that had happened earlier in the evening. The two startling phone calls had quite knocked it out of his head.

He was at the bedroom door. He turned around slowly and looked at the phone. The house was very quiet.

It occurred to him that from one way of looking at it, those two phone calls, coming just when they did, constituted a very unpleasant coincidence.

But a scientist ought to have a healthy disregard for coincidences.

He could hear Tansy breathing softly, regularly.

He switched out the light in the hall and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV

AS NORMAN WALKED THE LAST BLOCK to Hempnell the next morning, it struck him with unusual forcefulness just how pseudo was Hempnell's Gothic. Odd to think how little scholarly thought that ornate architecture masked, and how much anxiety over low salaries and excessive administrative burdens; and among the students, how little passion for knowledge and how much passion, period—even though of a halting, advertisement-derived, movie-stimulated sort. But perhaps that

was just what that fabulous gray architecture was supposed to symbolize. even in the old monastic days when its arches and buttresses had been functional.

The walks were empty except for a few hurrying figures, but in three or four minutes the student body would spill out of chapel, a scattering tide of brightly-colored sweaters and jackets.

A delivery van came gliding around the corner as Norman started to cross the street. He stepped back on the curb with a shivery distaste. In this gasoline-obsessed world he didn't mind ordinary automobiles, but somehow trucks with their suggestion of an unwholesome gigantism touched him with a faint irrational horror.

In taking a quick glance around before he started across again, he thought he saw a girl student behind him, either very late for chapel or else cutting it altogether. The next moment he realized that it was Mrs. Carr. He waited for her to catch up with him.

The mistake was a natural one. In spite of her surely seventy years, the silver-haired Dean of Women had a remarkably youthful figure and carriage. Her gait was always brisk and almost supple. Only the second glance revealed the darkened neck, the network of heavy wrinkles, showed you that the slimness was of age not youth. Her manner didn't seem an affectation of girlishness or a pathetic

clinging to sex—or, if it were, a very subtle one—but rather a hungry infatuation with youthfulness, with dewiness, with freshness, so great that it influenced the very cells and electrical tensions of her body.

There is a cult of youth among the faculty members of our colleges, Norman began to think, a special form of the great American cult of youth, an almost vampiristic feeding on young eager feelings.

Mrs. Carr's arrival cut him short.

"And *how* is Tansy?" she asked, with such sweet solicitude that for a moment Norman wondered if the Dean of Women had even more of an inside wire on the private lives of the faculty than was generally surmised. But only for a moment. After all, sweet solicitude was the Dean of Women's stock-in-trade.

"We missed her at our last faculty wives' meeting," Mrs. Carr continued. "She's such a gay soul. And we *do* need gaiety these days." Cold morning sunlight glinted on her thick glasses and glowed frostily on her apple-red cheeks. She put her hand on his arm. "Hempnell *appreciates* Tansy, Professor Saylor."

Norman's "And why not?" changed to "I think that shows good judgment" as he said it. He derived sardonic amusement from recalling how ten years ago Mrs. Carr was a charter member of *The Saylor's-are-a-demoralizing-influence Club*.

Mrs. Carr's silvery laughter trilled in the chilly air. "I must get on to my student conferences," she said. "But remember, Hempness appreciates you too, Professor Saylor."

He watched her hurry off, wondering if her last remark meant there had been an unexpected improvement in his chances of getting the vacant chairmanship of the sociology department. Then he turned into Morton Hall.

When he had climbed to his office, the phone was ringing. It was Thompson, who handled Hempnell's public relations—almost the only administrative duty considered too vital to be entrusted to a mere professor.

Thompson's greeting was exceptionally affable. As always, Norman had the vision of a man who would be much happier selling soap. It would take a psychoanalyst, he thought, to discover what weird compulsion made Thompson cling to the fringes of the academic world. We only know that some potentially great salesmen feel impelled to do so.

"A rather delicate matter," Thompson was saying. Delicate matters were one of his fortes. "Just now one of the trustees phoned me. It seems he had heard a very odd story—he wouldn't tell me the source of his information—concerning you and Mrs. Saylor. That over Christmas vacation in New

York you had attended a party given by some prominent but . . . er . . . very gay theatrical people. He couldn't be quite straight about where it happened, the party seemed to have wandered all over New York. In fact it all sounded very unlikely. There was something about an impromptu act staged in a night club, and an academic gown, and an . . . er . . . strip-tease dancer. I told him I'd look into it. But naturally I thought . . . and I was wondering if you'd . . ."

"If I'd issue a denial? Sorry, but it wouldn't be honest. The story's substantially true."

"Oh . . . I see. Well, that's all there is to it then," Thompson answered bravely after a moment. "I thought you'd like to know though. The trustee . . . Fenner . . . was very hot under the collar. Talked my ear off about how these particular theatrical people were conspicuous for drunkenness and divorce."

"He was right about the former, not the latter. Mona and Welby Utell are faithful to each other after their fashion. Nice folk, I'll introduce you to them some time."

"Oh! . . . That would be interesting, yes," replied Thompson. "Good-by."

The warning buzzer sounded for classes. Norman stopped fingering the little obsidian knife he used for slitting envelopes, swiveled his chair away from the desk and leaned back, amusedly irritated at

this latest manifestation of the Hempnell "hush-hush" policy. Not that he had made any particular attempt to conceal the Utell party, which had been a trifle crazier than he had expected. Still, he had said nothing about it to anyone on campus. No use in being a fool. Now, after a matter of months, it had all come out anyway.

From where he sat, the roof ridge of Estrey Hall neatly bisected his office window along the diagonal. There was a medium-sized cement dragon frozen in the act of clambering down it. For the tenth time this morning he reminded himself that what had happened last night had really happened. It was not so easy. And yet, when you got down to it, Tansy's lapse into medievalism was not so very much stranger than Hempnell's architecture, with its sprinkling of gargoyles and other fabulous monsters designed to scare off evil spirits. The second buzzer sounded and he got up.

HIS CLASS IN "PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES" quieted down leisurely as he strode in. He set a student to explaining the sib as a factor in tribal organization, then put in the next five minutes organizing his thoughts and noting late arrivals and absentees. When the explanation, supplemented by blackboard diagrams of marriage groups, had become so complicated that Bronstein, the prize student,

was twitching with eagerness to take a hand, he call for comments and criticisms, and succeeded in getting a first-class argument going.

Finally the cocksure fraternity president in the second row said, "But all those ideas of social organization were based on ignorance, tradition and superstition. Unlike modern society."

That was Norman's cue. He lit in joyously, pulverized the defender of modern society with a point-by-point comparison of fraternities and primitive "young men's houses" down to the details of initiation ceremonies, which he dissected with scientific relish, and then launched into a broad analysis of present-day customs as they would appear to a hypothetical ethnologist from Mars. In passing, he drew a facetious analogy between sororities and primitive seclusion of girls at puberty.

The minutes raced pleasantly by as he demonstrated instances of cultural lag in everything from table manners to systems of measurements. Even the lone sleeper in the last row woke up and listened.

"Certainly we've made important innovation, chief among them the systematic use of the scientific method," he said at one point, "but the primitive groundwork is still there, dominating the pattern of our lives. We're modified anthropoid apes inhabiting night



clubs and battleships. What else could you expect us to be?"

Marriage and courtship got special attention. With Bronstein grinning delightfully, Norman drew detailed modern parallels to marriage by purchase, marriage by capture, and symbolic marriage to a deity. He showed that trial marriage is no mere modern conception but a well-established ancient custom, successfully practiced by the Polynesians and others.

At this point he became aware of a beet-red, angry face toward the back of the room—that of Gracine Pollard, daughter of Hempnell's president. She glared at him, pointedly ignoring the interest taken by the neighboring students in her blushes.

Automatically it occurred to him, "Now I suppose the little neurotic will go yammering to Papa that Professor Saylor is advocating free love." He shrugged the idea aside and continued the discussion without modification. The buzzer cut it short.

But he was feeling irritated with himself. He only half listened to the enthusiastic comments and questions of Bronstein and a couple of others.

Back at the office he found a note from Harold Gunnison, the Dean of Men. Having the next hour free, he set out across the quadrangle for the Administration Building, Bronstein still tagging along to expound some theory of his own.

But Norman was wondering why he had let himself go. Admittedly, some of his remarks had been a trifle raw. He had long ago adjusted his classroom behavior to Hempnell standards, without losing intellectual integrity, and this morning's ill-advised though trivial deviation bothered him.

Mrs. Carr swept by him without a word, her face slightly averted, cutting him cold. A moment later he guessed a possible explanation. In his abstraction, he had lighted a cigarette. Moreover, Bronstein had followed suit, obviously delighted at faculty infraction of a firmly established taboo. The faculty were only supposed to smoke in their dingy clubroom or, on the quiet, in their offices.

He frowned, but continued to smoke. Evidently the events of the previous night had disturbed his mind more than he had realized. He ground out the butt on the steps of the Administration Building.

In the doorway to the outer office he collided with the stylishly stout form of Mrs. Gunnison.

"Lucky I had a good hold on my camera," she grumbled, as he stooped to recover her bulging handbag. "I'd hate to have to try to replace these lenses." Then brushing back an untidy wisp of reddish hair from her forehead, "You look worried. How's Tansy?"

He answered briefly, sliding past her. Now there was a woman who really ought to be a witch. Expen-

sive clothes worn sloppily; bossy, snobbish, and gruff; good-humored in a beefy fashion, but capable of riding rough-shod over anyone else's desires. The only person in whose presence her husband's authority seemed quite ridiculous.

Harold Gunnison cut short a telephone call and motioned Norman to come in and shut the door.

"Norman," Gunnison began, scowling, "this is a pretty delicate matter."

Norman became attentive. When Harold Gunnison said something was a delicate matter, unlike Thompson, he really meant it. He and Norman played squash together and got on pretty well. Norman's only serious objection to Gunnison was the latter's mutual admiration society with President Pollard, wherein solemn references to Pollard's political ideas and exaggerations of his friendship with national political figures were traded for occasional orotund commendations of the Dean of Men's Office.

But Harold had said, "A delicate matter." Norman braced himself to hear an account of eccentric, indiscreet, or even criminal behavior on the part of Tansy. That suddenly seemed the obvious explanation.

"You have a girl from the Student Employment Agency working for you? A Margaret Van Nice?"

Abruptly Norman realized who had made the second telephone call last night. Covering his shock, he

waited a moment and said, "A rather quiet kid. Does mimeographing." Then, with an involuntary look of enlightenment, "Always talks in a whisper."

"Well, a little while ago she threw an hysterical fit in Mrs. Carr's office. Claimed that you had seduced her. Mrs. Carr immediately dumped the whole business in my lap."

Norman fought the impulse to tell about the phone conversation, contented himself with, "Well?"

Gunnison frowned and cocked a sad eye at him.

"I know things like that have happened," Norman said. "Right here at Hempnall. But not this time."

"Of course, Norman."

"Sure. There was opportunity though. We worked late several nights over at Morton."

Gunnison reached for a folder. "On a chance I got out her neurotic index. She ranks way up near the top. A regular bundle of complexes. We'll just have to handle it smoothly."

"I'll want to hear her accuse me," said Norman. "Soon as possible."

"Of course. I've arranged for a meeting at Mrs. Carr's office. Four o'clock this afternoon. Meantime she's seeing Dr. Gardner. That should sober her up." "Four o'clock," repeated Norman, standing up. "You'll be there?"

"Certainly. I'm sorry about this

whole business, Norman. Frankly, I think Mrs. Carr botched it up. Got panicky. She's a pretty old lady."

IN THE OUTER OFFICE
NORMAN STOPPED to glance at a small display case of items concerned with Gunnison's work in physical chemistry. The present display was of Prince Rupert drops and other high-tension oddities. He stared moodily at the shiny dark globules with their stiff, twisted tails, vaguely noting the card which told how they were produced by dripping molten glass into hot oil. It occurred to him that **HEMPNELL** was something like A Prince Rupert drop. Hit the main body with a hammer and you only jarred your hand. But flick with a fingernail the delicate filament in which the drop ended, and it would explode in your face.

Fanciful.

He glanced at the other objects, among them a tiny mirror which, the legend explained, would fly to powder at the slightest scratch or sudden uneven change in temperature.

Yet it wasn't so fanciful, when you got to thinking about it. Any overorganized, tension-shot, somewhat artificial institution such as a small college tends to develop danger points. And the same would be true of a person or a career. Flick the delicate spot in the mind of a neurotic girl, and she would erupt with wild accusations. Or take a

saner person, like himself. Suppose someone were studying him secretly, looking for the vulnerable filament, finger poised to flick—

But that was really getting fanciful. He hurried off to his last morning class.

Coming out of it, Hervey Sawtell buttonholed him.

Norman's departmental colleague resembled an unfriendly caricature of a college professor. Little older than Norman, but with the personality of a septuagenarian, or a frightened adolescent. He was always in a hurry, nervous to the point of twitching, and he sometimes carried two brief cases. Norman saw in him one of the all too many victims of intellectual vanity. Very likely during his own college days Hervey Sawtelle had been goaded by arrogant instructors into believing that he ought to know everything about everything, be familiar with all the authorities on all the subjects, including medieval music, differential equations, and modern poetry, be able to produce an instant knowing rejoinder to any conceivable intellectual remark, including those made in dead and foreign languages, and never under any circumstances ask a question. Failing in his subsequent frantic efforts to become much more than a modern Bacon, Hervey Sawtelle had presumably conceived a deep conviction of his intellectual inadequacy, which he tried to conceal, or perhaps forget, by a furious

attention to detail.

All this showed in his narrow, shrunken, thin-lipped, high-browed face. Routine worries ceaselessly chased themselves up and down it.

But at the moment he was in the grip of one of his petty excitements.

"Say, Norman, the most interesting thing! I was down in the stacks this morning, and I happened to pull out an old doctor's thesis—1930—by someone I never heard of—with the title *Superstition and Neurosis*." He produced a bound, typewritten manuscript that looked as if it had aged without ever being opened. "Almost the same title as your *Parallelisms in Superstition and Neurosis*. An odd coincidence, eh? I'm going to look it over tonight."

They were hurrying together toward the dining hall down a walk flooded with jabbering, laughing students, who curtsied smilingly out of their way. Norman studied Sawtelle's face covertly. Surely the fool must remember that his *Parallelisms* had been published in 1931, giving an ugly suggestion of plagiarism. But Sawtelle's nervous toothy grin was without guile.

He had the impulse to pull Sawtelle aside and tell him that there was something odder than a coincidence involved, and that it did not reflect in any way on his own integrity of scholarship. But this seemed hardly the place.

Yet there was no denying the

incident bothered him a trifle. Why, it was years since he had even thought of that stupid business of Cunningham's thesis. It had lain buried in the past—a hidden vulnerability, waiting for the flick of the fingernail.

Asinine fancifulness! It could all be very well explained, to Sawtelle or anyone else, at a more suitable time.

Sawtelle's mind was back to habitual anxieties. "You know, we should be having our conference on the social-science program for next year. On the other hand, I suppose we should wait until—" He paused embarrassedly.

"Until it's decided whether you or I get the chairmanship of the department?" Norman finished for him. "I don't see why. We'll be working together in any case."

"Yes, of course. I didn't mean to suggest—"

They were joined by some other faculty members on the steps of the dining hall. The deafening clatter of trays from the student section was subdued to a slightly fainter din as they entered the faculty sanctum.

Conversation revolved among the old familiar topics, with an undercurrent of speculation as to what reorganizations and expansions of staff the new year might bring to Hempenell. There was some reference to the political ambitions of President Pollard—Harold Gunnison con-

fided that a certain powerful political group was attempting to persuade him to run for governor; discreet silences here and there around the table substituted for adverse criticisms on this possibility. Sawtelle's Adam's apple twitched convulsively at a chance reference to the vacant chairmanship in sociology.

Norman managed to get a fairly interesting conversation going, with Holstrom of psychology. He was glad he would be busy with classes and conferences until four o'clock. He knew he could work half again as hard as someone like Sawtelle, but if he had to do one quarter of the worrying that man did—

Yet the four o'clock meeting proved to be an anti-climax. He had no sooner put his hand on the door leading to Mrs. Carr's office, when—as if that had provided the necessary stimulus—a shrill, tearful voice burst out with: "It's all a lie! I made it up!"

GUNNISON WAS SITTING NEAR THE WINDOW, face a trifle averted, arms folded, looking like a slightly bored, slightly embarrassed elephant. In a chair in the center of the room was huddled a delicate, fair-haired girl, tears dribbling down her flat cheeks and hysterical sobs racking her shoulders. Mrs. Carr was trying to calm her in a fluttery way.

"I don't know why I did it," the

girl bleated pitifully. "I was in love with him and he wouldn't even look at me. I was going to kill myself last night, and I thought I would do this instead, to hurt him, or—"

"Now, Margaret, you must control yourself," Mrs. Carr admonished, her hands hovering over the girl's shoulders.

"Just a minute," Norman said. "Miss Van Nice—"

She looked around and up at him, apparently just becoming aware of his presence.

Norman waited a little. Neither of them moved. Then he said, "Miss Van Nice, last night between the time you decided to kill yourself and the time you decided to hurt me this way, did you do something else? Did you by any chance make a phone call?"

The girl didn't answer, but after a few moments a blush appeared on her tear-stained face, overspread it, and flowed down under her dress. A little later even her forearms were dull red.

Gunnison registered vague curiosity.

Mrs. Carr looked at the girl sharply, bending toward her. For a moment Norman fancied that there was something distinctly venomous in her searching glance. But that was probably just a trick of the thick glasses, which sometimes magnified Mrs. Carr's eyes until they looked fishlike.

The girl did not react as Mrs.

Carr's hands touched her shoulders. She was still looking at Norman, now with an expression of agonized embarrassment and entreaty.

"That's all right," Norman said softly. "Nothing to worry about," and he smiled at her sympathetically.

The girl's expression changed completely. She suddenly shook loose from Mrs. Carr and sprang up facing Norman. "Oh, I hate you!" she screamed. "I hate you!"

Gunnison followed him out of the office. He yawned, shook his head, and remarked. "Glad that's over. Incidentally, Gardner says nothing could possibly have happened to her."

"Never a dull moment," Norman responded, absently.

"Oh, by the way," Gunnison said, dragging a stiff white envelope out of his inside pocket, "here's a note for Mrs. Saylor. Hulda asked me to give it to you. I forgot about it before."

"I met Hulda coming out of your office this morning," Norman said, his thoughts still elsewhere.

Somewhat later, back at Morton, Norman tried to come to grips with those thoughts, but found them remarkably slippery. The dragon on the roof ridge of Estrey Hall lured away his attention. Funny about little things like that. You never even noticed them for years and then they suddenly popped into focus. How many people could

give you one single definite fact about the architectural ornaments of buildings in which they worked? Not one in ten, probably. Why, if you had asked him yesterday about that dragon, he couldn't for his life have been able to tell you even if there was one or not.

He leaned on the window sill, looking at the lizard-like yet grotesquely anthropoid form, bathed in the yellow sunset glow, which, his wandering mind remembered, was supposed to symbolize the souls of the dead passing into and out of the underworld. Below the dragon, jutting from under the cornice, was a sculptured head, one of a series of famous scientists and mathematicians decorating the entablature. He made out the name "Galileo," along with a brief inscription of some sort.

When he turned back to answer the phone, it suddenly seemed very dark in the office.

"Saylor? I just want to tell you that I'm going to give you until tomorrow—"

"Listen, Jennings," Norman cut in sharply, "I hung up on you last night because you kept shouting into the phone. This threatening line won't do you any good."

The voice continued where it had broken off, growing dangerously high. "—until tomorrow to withdraw your charges and have me reinstated at Hempnell."

Then the voice broke into a screaming obscene torrent of abuse, so loud that Norman could still hear it very plainly as he placed the receiver back in the cradle.

Paranoid—that was the way it sounded.

Then he suddenly sat ver still.

At twenty past one last night he had burned a charm supposedly designed to ward off evil influence from him. The last of Tansy's hands."

At about the same time Margaret Van Nice had decided to avow her fanciful passion for him, and Theodore Jennings had decided to make him responsible for an imaginary plot.

Next morning sanctimonious Trustee Fenner had called up Thompson about the Utell party, and Hervey Sawtelle, poking around in the stacks had found—
Rubbish!

With an angry snort of laughter at his own credulity, he picked up his hat and headed for home.

CHAPTER V

TANSY WAS IN A RADIANT MOOD, prettier than she had seemed in months. Twice he caught her smiling to herself, when he glanced up from his supper.

He gave her the note from Mrs. Gunnison. "Mrs. Carr asked after you, too. Gushed all over me—in a ladylike way, of course. Then, later on—" He caught himself as he

started to tell about the cigarette and Mrs. Carr cutting him and the whole Margaret Van Nice business. No use worrying Tansy right now with things that might be considered bad luck. No telling what further construction she might put upon them.

She glanced through the note and handed it back to him.

"It has the authentic Hempnell flavor, don't you think?" she observed.

He read:

Dear Tansy: Where are you keeping yourself? I haven't seen you on campus more than once or twice this last month. If you're busy with something especially interesting, why not tell us about it? Why not come to tea this Saturday, and tell me all about yourself?

Hulda
P.S. You're supposed to bring four dozen cookies to the Local Alumni Wives' Reception the Saturday after.

"Rather confused-sounding," he said, "but I clearly perceive the keen bludgeon of Mrs. Gunnison. She looked particularly sloppy today."

Tansy laughed. "Still, we have been pretty antisocial these last weeks. I believe I'll ask them over for bridge tomorrow night. It's short notice, but they're usually free Wednesdays. And the Sawtelles."

"Do we have to? That henpecker?"

Tansy laughed. "I don't know how you would ever manage to get along without me—" She stopped short. "I'm afraid you'll have to endure Evelyn. After all, Hervey's the other important man in your department, and it's expected that you see something of each other socially. To make two tables, I'll invite the Carrs."

"Three fearful females," said Norman. "If they represent the average run of professors' wives, I was lucky to get you."

"I sometimes think the same thing about professors' wives' husbands," said Tansy.

As they smoked over the coffee, she said hesitatingly, "Norm, I said I didn't want to talk about last night. But now there's something I want to tell you."

He nodded.

"I didn't tell you last night, Norm, but when we burned those . . . things, I was terribly frightened. I felt that we were knocking holes in walls that had taken me years to build, and that now there was nothing to keep out the—"

He said nothing, sat very still.

"Oh, it's hard to explain, but ever since I began to . . . play with those things, I've been conscious of pressure from outside. A vague neurotic fear, something like the way *you* feel about trucks. Things trying to push their way in and get

at us. And I've had to press them back, fight back at them with my—it's like that test of strength men sometimes make, trying to force each other's hand to the table. But that wasn't what I was starting to say.

"I went to bed feeling miserable and scared. The pressure from outside kept tightening around me, and I couldn't resist it, because we'd burned those things. And then suddenly, as I lay in the dark, about an hour after I went to bed, I got the most tremendous feeling of relief. The pressure vanished, as if I'd bobbed up to the surface after almost drowning. And I knew then . . . that I'd gotten over my craziness. That's why I'm so happy."

It was hard for Norman not to tell Tansy what he was thinking. Here was one more coincidence, but it knocked the others into a cocked hat. At about the same time as he had burned the last charm, experiencing a sensation of fear, Tansy had felt a great relief. That would teach him to build theories on coincidences!

"For I was crazy in a way, dear," she was saying. "There aren't many people who would have taken it as you did."

He said, "You weren't crazy—which is a relative term, anyway, applicable to anyone. You were just fooled by the cussedness of things."

"Cussedness?"

"Yes. The way nails sometimes insist on bending when you hammer, as if they were trying to. Or the way machinery refuses to work. Matter's funny stuff. In large aggregates, it obeys natural law, but when you get down to the individual atom or electron, it's largely a matter of chance or whim—" This conversation was not taking the direction he wanted it to, and he was thankful when Totem jumped onto the table, creating a diversion.

It turned out to be the pleasantest evening they had spent together in ages.

But next morning when he arrived at Morton, Norman wished he had not gotten started on that "cussedness of things" notion. It stuck in his mind. He found himself puzzling over the merest trifles—such as the precise position of that idiotic cement dragon. Yesterday he remembered thinking that it was exactly in the middle of the descending roof ridge. But now he saw that it was obviously two thirds of the way down, quite near the architrave topping the huge useless Gothic gateway set between Estrey and Morton. Even a social scientist ought to have better powers of observation than that!

The jangle of the phone coincided with the nine o'clock buzzer.

"Professor Saylor?" Thompson's voice was apologetic. "I'm sorry to bother you again, but I just got another inquiry from one of the

trustees—Liddell, this time. Concerning an informal address you were supposed to have delivered at about the same time as that . . . er . . . party. The topic was 'What's wrong with College Education.' "

"Well, what about it? Are you implying there's nothing wrong with college education, or that the topic is taboo?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no. But the trustee seemed to think that you were making a criticism of Hempnell."

"Of small colleges of the same type as Hempnell, yes. Of Hempnell specifically, no."

"Well, he seemed to fear it might have a detrimental effect on enrollment for next year. Spoke of several friends of his with children of college age as having heard your address and being unfavorable impressed."

"Then they were supersensitive."

"He also seemed to think you had made a slighting reference to President Pollard's . . . er . . . political activities."

"I'm sorry but I have to get along to a class now."

"Very well," said Thompson, and hung up. Norman grimaced. The cussedness of things certainly wasn't to be compared with the cussedness of people! Then he jumped up and hurried off to his "Primitive Societies."

Gracine Pollard was absent, he



noted with an inward grin, wondering if yesterday's lecture had been too much for her warped sense of propriety. But even the daughters of college presidents ought to be told a few home truths now and then.

And on the others, yesterday's lecture had had a markedly stimulating effect. Several students had abruptly chosen related subjects for their term papers, and the fraternity president had capitalized on his yesterday's discomfiture by planning a humorous article for the *Hempnell Buffoon* on the primitive significance of fraternity initiations. All in all they had a very brisk session.

AFTERWARDS NORMAN FOUND HIMSELF MUSING good-humoredly on how college students were misunderstood by a great many people.

Collegians were generally viewed as dangerously rebellious and radical, and shockingly experimental in their morality. Indeed the lower classes were inclined to picture them as monsters of unwholesomeness and perversion, potential murderers of little children and celebrants of various equivalents of the Black Mass. Whereas actually they were more conventional than many high school kids. And as for experiments in sex, they were a long way behind those whose education ended with grade school.

Instead of standing up boldly in the classroom and uttering rebel pronouncement, they were much more apt to be fawningly hypocritical, desirous only of saying the thing that would please the teacher most. Small danger of their getting out of hand! On the contrary, it was necessary to charm them slowly into truthfulness, away from the taboos and narrow-mindedness of the home. And how much more complex these problems became, and needful of solution, when you were living in an obvious time of interim morality like today, when national loyalty and faithfulness to family alone were dissolving in favor of a wider loyalty and a wider love—or in favor of a selfish, dog-eat-dog, atom-bombed chaos, if the human spirit were hedged, clipped, and dwarfed by traditional egotisms and fears.

College faculty members were as badly misrepresented to the general public as were college students. Actually they were a pretty timorous folk, exceedingly sensitive to social disapproval. That they occasionally spoke out fearlessly was all the more to their credit.

All of which of course reflected society's slow-dying tendency to view teachers not as educators but as vestal virgins of a sort, living sacrifices on the altar of respectability, housed in suitably grim buildings and judged on the basis

of a far stricter moral code than that applied to businessmen and housewives. And in their vestal-virgining, their virginity counted much more than their tending of the feeble flame of imaginative curiosity and honest intellectual inquiry. Indeed, for all most people cared, the flame might safely be let go out, so long as the teachers remained sitting around it in their temple—inviolate, sour-faced, and quite frozen testimonials to the fact that somebody was upholding moral values somewhere.

Norman thought wryly: Why, they actually *want* us to be witches, of a harmless sort. And I made Tansy stop!

The irony tickled him and he smiled.

His good humor lasted until after his last class that afternoon, when he happened to meet the Sawtelles in front of Morton Hall.

Evelyn Sawtelle was a snob and a fake intellectual. The illusion she tried most to encourage was that she had sacrificed a great career in the theater in order to marry Hervey. While in reality she had never been able to wrangle the directorship of the Hempnell Student Players and had had to content herself with a minor position in the speech department. She had an affected carriage and a slightly arty taste in clothes that, taken along with her flat cheeks and dull black hair and eyes, suggested the sort of creature you sometimes see stalking

through the lobby at ballet and concert intermissions.

But far from being a bohemian, Evelyn Sawtelle was even more inclined to agonize over the minutiae of social convention and prestige than most Hempnell faculty wives. Yet because of her general incompetence, this anxiety did not result in tactfulness, but rather its opposite.

Her husband was completely under her thumb. She managed him like a business—bunglingly, overzealously, but with a certain dogged effectiveness.

"I had lunch today with Henrietta . . . I mean Mrs. Pollard," she announced to Norman with the air of one who has just visited royalty.

"Oh, say, Norman—" Hervey began excitedly, thrusting forward his brief case.

"We talked about you, too, Norman. It seems Gracine has been misinterpreting some of the things you've been saying in your class. She's such a sensitive girl."

"Dumb bunny, you mean," Norman corrected mentally. He murmured, "Oh?" with some show of politeness.

"Dear Henrietta was a little puzzled as just how to handle it, though of course she's a very tolerant, cosmopolitan soul. I just mentioned it because I thought you'd want to know. After all, it is very important that no one get any wrong impressions about the department. Don't you agree with

me, Hervey?" She ended sharply.

"What, dear? Oh, yes, yes. Say, Norman, I want to tell you about that thesis I showed you yesterday. The most amazing thing! Its main arguments are almost the same as those in your book! An amazing case of independent investigators arriving at the same conclusions. Why, it's like Darwin and Wallace, or—"

"You didn't tell *me* anything about this dear," said his wife.

"Wait a minute," said Norman.

He hated to make an explanation in Mrs. Sawtelle's presence, but it had to be done.

"Sorry, Hervey, to have to substitute a rather sordid story for an intriguing scientific coincidence. It happened when I was an instructor here—1929, my first year. A graduate student named Cunningham got hold of my ideas—I was friendly with him—and incorporated them into his doctor's thesis. My work in superstition and neurosis was just a side line then, and partly because I was sick with pneumonia for two months I didn't read his thesis until after he'd gotten his degree."

Sawtelle blinked. His face resumed its usual worried expression. A look of vague disappointment came into Mrs. Sawtelle's black-button eyes, as if she would have liked to read the thesis, lingering over each paragraph, letting her suspicions have full scope, before hearing the explanation.

"I was very angry," Norman continued, "and intended to expose him. But then I heard he'd died. There was some hint of suicide. He was an unbalanced chap. How he'd hoped to get away with such an out-and-out steal, I don't know. Anyway, I decided not to do anything about it, for his family's sake. You see, it would have supplied a reason for thinking he *had* committed suicide."

Mrs. Sawtelle looked incredulous.

"But, Norman," Sawtelle commented anxiously, "was that really wise? I mean to keep silent. Weren't you taking a chance? I mean with regard to your academic reputation?"

Abruptly Mrs. Sawtelle's manner changed.

"Put that thing back in the stacks, Hervey, and forget about it," she directed curtly. Then she snuled archly at Norman. "I've been forgetting I have a surprise for you, Professor Saylor. Come down to the sound booth now, and I'll show you. It won't take a minute. Come along, Hervey."

NORMAN HAD NO EXCUSE READY, so he accompanied the Sawtelles to the rooms of the speech department at the other end of Morton, wondering how the speech department ever found any use for someone with as nasal and affected a voice as Evelyn Sawtelle, even if she did happen to be a

professor's wife and a thwarted tragedienne.

The sound booth was dim and quiet, a solid box with sound-resistant walls and double windows. Mrs. Sawtelle took a disk from the cabinet, put it on one of the three turntables, and adjusted a couple of dials. Norman jerked. For an instant he thought that a truck was roaring toward the sound booth and would momentarily crash through the insulating walls. Then the abominable noise pouring from the amplifier changed to a strangely pulsing wail or whirl, as of wind prying at a house. It struck a less usual chord, though, in Norman's agitated memory.

Mrs. Sawtelle darted back and swiveled the dials.

"I made a mistake," she said. "That's some modernistic music or other. Hervey, switch on the light. Here's the record I wanted." She put it on one of the other turntables.

"It sounded awful, whatever it was," her husband observed.

Norman had identified his memory. It was of an Australian bull-roarer a colleague had once demonstrated for him. The curved slat of wood, whirled at the end of a cord, made exactly the same sound. The aborigines used it in their rain magic.

"... but if, in these times of misunderstanding and strife, we willfully or carelessly forget that every word and thought must refer

to something in the real world, if we allow references to the unreal and the nonexistent to creep into our minds . . ."

Again Norman started. For now it was his own voice that was coming out of the amplifier and he had an odd sense of jerking back in time.

"Surprised?" Evelyn Sawtelle questioned coyly. "It's that talk on semantics you gave the students last week. We had a mike spotted by the speaker's rostrum—I suppose you thought it was for amplification—and we made a sneak recording, as we call it. We cut it down here."

She indicated the heavier, cement-based turntable for making recording. Her hands fluttered around the dials.

"We can do all sorts of things down here," she babbled on. "Mix all sorts of sounds. Music against voices. And—"

"Words *can* hurt us, you know. And oddly enough, it's the words that refer to thing that *aren't*, that can hurt us most. Why . . ."

It was hard for Norman to appear even slightly pleased. He knew his reasons were no more sensible than those of a savage afraid someone will learn his secret name, yet all the same he disliked the idea of Evelyn Sawtelle monkeying around with his voice. Like her dully malicious, smallsocketed eyes, it suggested a prying for hidden weaknesses.

And then Norman moved involuntarily for a third time. For suddenly out of the amplifier, but now mixed with his voice, came the sound of the bull-roarer that still had that devilish hint of an onrushing truck.

"Oh, there I've done it again," said Evelyn Sawtelle rapidly, snatching at the dials. "Messing up your beautiful voice with that terrible music." She grimaced. "But then, as you just said, Professor Saylor, sounds can't hurt us."

Norman did not correct her typical misquoting. He looked at her curiously for a moment. She stood facing him, her hands behind her. Her husband, his nose twitching, had idled over to the still moving turntables and was gingerly poking a finger at one of them.

"No," said Norman slowly, "they can't." And then he excused himself with a brusque, "Well, thanks for the demonstration."

"We'll see you tonight," Evelyn called after him. Somehow it sounded like, "You won't get rid of me."

How I detest that woman, thought Norman, as he hurried up the dark stair and down the corridor.

Back at his office, he put in a good hour's work on his notes. Then getting up to switch on the light, his glance happened to fall on the window.

After a few moments, he jerked away and darted to the closet to get

his field glasses.

Someone must have a very obscure sense of humor to perpetrate such a complicated practical joke.

Intently he searched the cement at the juncture of roof ridge and clawed feet, looking for the telltale cracks. He could not sport any, but that would not have been easy in the failing yellow light.

The cement dragon now stood at the edge of the gutter, as if about to walk over to Morton along the architrave of the big gateway.

He lifted his glasses to the creature's head—blank and crude as an unfinished skull. Then on an impulse he dropped down to the row of sculptured heads, focused on Galileo, and read the little inscription he had not been able to make out before.

"Eppur si muove."

The words Galileo was supposed to have muttered after recanting before the Inquisition his belief in the revolution of the earth around the sun.

"Nevertheless, it moves."

A board creaked behind him, and he spun around.

BY HIS DESK STOOD A YOUNG MAN, waxen pale, with thick red hair. His eyes stood out like milky marbles. One white, tendon-ridged hand gripped a .22 target pistol.

Norman walked toward him, bearing slightly to the right.

The skimpy barrel of the gun came up.

"Hullo, Jennings," said Norman. "You've been reinstated. Your grades have been changed to straight A's."

The gun barrel slowed for an instant.

Norman lunged in.

The gun went off under his left arm, pinking the window.

The gun clunked on the floor. Jennings's skinny form went limp. As Norman sat him down on the chair, he began to sob, convulsively.

Norman picked up the gun by the barrel, laid it in a drawer, locked the drawer, pocketed the key. Then he lifted the phone and asked for an on-campus number. The connection was made quickly. "Gunnison?" he asked.

"Uh-huh, just caught me as I was leaving."

"Theodore Jennings' parents live right near the college, don't they? You know, the chap who flunked out last semester."

"Of course they do. What's the matter?"

"Better get them over here quick. And have them bring his doctor. He just tried to shoot me. Yes, *his* doctor. No, neither of us is hurt. But quickly."

Norman put down the phone. Jennings continued to sob agonizingly. Norman looked at him with disgust for a moment, then patted his shoulder.

An hour later Gunnison sat down in the same chair, and let off a sigh of relief.

"I'm sure glad they agreed about asking for his commitment to the asylum," he said. "It was awfully good of you, Norman, not to insist on the police. Things like that give a college a bad name."

Norman smiled wearily. "Almost anything gives a college a bad name. But that kid was obviously as crazy as a loon. And of course I understand how much the Jenningses, with their political connections and influence, mean to Pollard."

Gunnison nodded. They lit up and smoked for a while in silence. Norman thought how different real life was from a detective story, where an attempted murder was generally considered a most serious thing, an occasion for much turmoil and telephoning and the gathering of flocks of official and unofficial detectives. Whereas here, because it occurred in an area of life governed by responsibility rather than sensation, it was easily hushed up and forgotten.

Gunnison looked at his watch. "I'll have to hustle. It's almost seven, and we're due at your place at eight."

But he lingered, ambling over to the window to inspect the bullet hole.

"I wonder if you'd mind not mentioning this to Tansy?" Norman asked. "I don't want to worry

her."

Gunnison nodded. "Good thing if we kept it to ourselves." Then he pointed out the window. "That's one of my wife's pets," he remarked in a jocular tone.

Norman saw that his finger was trained on the cement dragon, now coldly revealed by the upward glare from the street lights.

"I mean," Gunnison went on, "she must have a dozen photographs of it. Hempnell's her specialty. I believe she's got a photograph of every architectural oddity on campus. That one is her favorite." He chuckled. "Usually it's the husband who keeps ducking down into the darkroom, but not in our family. And me a chemist, at that."

Norman's taut mind had unaccountably jumped to the thought of a bull-roarer. Abruptly he realized the analogy between the recording of a bull-roarer and the photograph of a dragon.

He clamped a lid on the fantastic questions he wanted to ask Gunnison.

"Come on!" he said. "We'd better get along."

Gunnison started a little at the harshness of his voice.

"Can you drop me off?" asked Norman in quieter tones. "My car's at home."

"Sure thing," said Gunnison.

After he had switched out the lights, Norman paused for a moment, staring at the window. The

words came back.
"Eppur si muove."

CHAPTER VI

THEY HAD HARDLY CLEARED AWAY the remains of a hasty supper, when there came the first clang from the front-door chimes. To Norman's relief, Tansy had accepted without questioning his rather clumsy explanation of why he had gotten home so late. There was something puzzling, though, about her serenity these last two days. She was usually much sharper and more curious. But of course he had been careful to hide disturbing events from her, and he ought only to be glad her nerves were in such good shape.

"Dearest! It's been *ages* since we've seen you!" Mrs. Carr embraced Tansy cuddlingly. "How are you? How are you?" The question sounded peculiarly eager and incisive. Norman put it down to typical Hempnell gush. "Oh, dear, I'm afraid I've got a cinder in my eye," Mrs. Carr continued. "The wind's getting quite fierce."

"Gusty," said Professor Carr of the mathematics department, showing harmless delight at finding the right word. He was a little man with red cheeks and a white Vandike, as innocent and absent-minded as college professors are supposed to be. He gave the impression of residing permanently in a special paradise of transcendental

and transfinite numbers and of the hieroglyphs of symbolic logic, for whose manipulations he had a nationally recognized fame among mathematicians. Russell and Whitehead may have invented those hieroglyphs, but when it came to handling, cherishing, and coaxing the exasperating, riddlesome things, Carr was the champion prestidigitator.

"It seems to have gone away now," said Mrs. Carr, waving aside Tansy's handkerchief and experimentally blinking her eyes, which looked unpleasantly naked until she replaced her thick glasses. "Oh, that must be the others," she added, as the chimes sounded. "Isn't it *marvelous* that everyone at Hempnell is so punctual?"

As Norman started for the front door he imagined for one crazy moment that someone must be whirling a bullroarer outside, until he realized it could only be the rising wind living up to Professor Carr's description of it.

He was confronted by Evelyn Sawtelle's angular form, wind whipping her black coat against her legs. Her equally angular face, with its shoe-button eyes, was thrust toward his own.

"Let us in, or it'll blow us in," she said. Like most of her attempts at coy or facetious humor, it did not come off, perhaps because she made it sound so stupidly grim.

She entered, with Hervey in tow, and made for Tansy.

"My dear, how are you? Whatever have you been doing with yourself?" Again Norman was struck by the eager and meaningful tone of the question. For a moment he wondered whether the woman had somehow gotten an inkling of Tansy's eccentricity and the recent crisis. But Mrs. Sawtelle was so voice-conscious that she was always emphasizing things the wrong way.

There was a noisy flurry of greetings. Totem squeaked and darted out of the way of the crowd of human beings. Mrs. Carr's voice rose above the rest, shrilling girlishly.

"Oh, Professor Sawtelle, I want to tell you how *much* we appreciated your talk on city planning. It was truly *significant!*" Sawtelle writhed.

Norman thought: "So now *he's* the favorite for the chairmanship."

Professor Carr had made a beeline for the bridge tables and was wistfully fingering the cards.

"I've been studying the mathematics of the shuffle," he began with a bright-eyed air, as soon as Norman drifted into range. "The shuffle is supposed to make it a matter of chance what hands are dealt. But that is not true at all." He broke open a new pack of cards and spread the deck. "The manufacturers arrange these by suits—thirteen spades, thirteen hearts, and so on. Now suppose I make a perfect shuffle—divide the pack into equal parts and interleaf

the cards one by one.

He tried to demonstrate, but the cards got away from him.

"It's really not as hard as it looks," he continued amiably. "Some players can do it every time, quick as a wink. But that's not the point. Suppose I make two perfect shuffles with a new pack. Then, no matter how the cards are cut, each player will get thirteen of a suit—an event that, if you went purely by the laws of chance, would happen only once in about one hundred and fifty-eight billion times as regards a *single* hand, let alone all four."

Norman nodded and Carr smiled delightedly.

"That's only one example. It comes to this: What is loosely termed chance is really the resultant of several perfectly definite factors—chiefly the play of cards on each hand, and the shuffle-habits of the players." He made it sound as important as the Theory of Relativity. "Some evenings the hands are very ordinary. Other evenings they keep getting wilder and wilder—long suits, voids and so on. Sometimes the cards persistently run north and south. Other times, east and west. Luck? Chance? Not at all! It's the result of known causes. Some expert players actually make use of this principle to determine the probable location of key cards. They remember how the cards were played on the last hand, how the packets were put

together, how the shuffle-habits of the maker have disarranged the cards. Then they interpret that information according to the bids and opening leads the next time the cards are used. Why, it's really quite simply—or would be for a blindfolded chess expert. And of course any really good bridge player should—"

Norman's mind went off at a tangent. Suppose you applied this principle outside bridge? Suppose that coincidence and other chance happenings weren't really as chancy as they looked? Suppose there were individuals with a special aptitude for calling the turns, making the breaks? But that was a pretty obvious idea—nothing to give a person the shiver it had given him.

"I wonder what's holding up the Gunnisons," Professor Carr was saying. "We might start one table now. Perhaps we can get in an extra rubber," he added hopefully.

A peal from the chimes settled the question.

Gunnison looked as if he had eaten his dinner too fast and Hulda seemed rather surly.

"We had to rush so," she muttered curtly to Norman as he held open the door.

Like the other two women, she almost ignored him and concentrated her greeting on Tansy. It gave him a vaguely uneasy feeling as when they had first come to Hempnell and faculty visits had

been a nerve-racking chore. Tansy seemed at a disadvantage, unprotected, in contrast to the aggressive air animating the other three.

But what of it?—he told himself. That was normal for Hempnell faculty wives. They acted as if they lay awake nights plotting to poison the people between their husbands and the president's chair.

Whereas Tansy—But that was like what Tansy had been doing or rather what Tansy had said *they* were doing. *She* hadn't been doing it. She had only been—His thoughts started to gyrate confusingly and he switched them off.

They cut for partners.

THE CARDS SEEMED DETERMINED to provide an illustration for the theory Carr had explained. The hands were uniformly commonplace—abnormally average. No long suits. Nothing but 4-4-3-2 and 4-3-3-3 distribution. Bid one; make two. Bid two; down one.

After the second round, Norman applied his private remedy for boredom—the game of "Spot the Primitive." You played it by yourself, secretly. It was just an exercise for an ethnologist's imagination. You pretended that the people around you were members of a savage race, and you tried to figure out how their personalities would manifest themselves in such an environment.

Tonight it worked almost too well.

Nothing unusual about the men. Gunnison, of course, would be a prosperous tribal chieftain; perhaps a little fatter, and tended by maidens, but with a jealous and vindictive wife waiting to pounce. Carr might figure as the basket maker of the village—a spry old man, grinning like a little monkey, weaving the basket fibers into intricate mathematical matrices. Sawtelle, of course, would be the tribal scapegoat, butt of endless painful practical jokes.

But the women!

Take Mrs. Gunnison, now his partner. Give her a brown skin. Leave the red hair, but twist some copper ornaments in it. She'd be heftier if anything, a real mountain of a woman, stronger than most of the men in the tribe, able to wield a spear or club. The same brutish eyes, but the lower lip would jut out in a more openly sullen and domineering way. It was only too easy to imagine what she'd do to the unlucky maidens in whom her husband showed too much interest. Or how she would pound tribal policy into his head when they retired to their hut. Or how her voice would thunder out the death chants the women sang to aid the men away at war.

Then Mrs. Sawtelle and Mrs. Carr, who had progressed to the top table along with himself and Mrs. Gunnison. Mrs. Sawtelle first.

Make her skinnier. Scarify the flat cheeks with ornamental ridges. Tattoo the spine. Witch women. Bitter as quinine bark because her husband was ineffectual. Think of her prancing before a spike-studded fetish. Think of her screeching incantations and ripping off a chicken's head . . .

"Norman, you are playing out of turn," said Mrs. Gunnison.

"Sorry."

And Mrs. Carr. Shriveled her a bit. Leave only a few wisps of hair on the parchment skull. Take away the glasses, so her eyes would be gummy. She'd blink and peer shortsightedly, and leer toothlessly, and flutter her bony claws. A nice harmless old squaw, who'd gather the tribe's children around her (always that hunger for youth!) and tell them legends. But her jaw would still be able to snap like a steel trap, and her clawlike hands would be deft at applying arrow poison, and she wouldn't really need her eyes because she'd have other ways of seeing things, and even the bravest warrior would grow nervous if she looked too long in his direction.

"Those experts at the top table are awfully quiet," called Gunnison with a laugh. "They must be taking the game very seriously."

Witch women, all three of them, engaged in booting their husbands to the top of the tribal hierarchy.

From the dark doorway at the far end of the room, Totem was



peering curiously, as if weighing some similar possibility.

But Norman could not fit Tansy into the picture. He could visualize physical changes, like frizzing her hair and putting some big rings in her ears and a painted design on her forehead. But he could not picture her as belonging to the same tribe. She persisted in his imagination as a stranger woman, a captive, eyed with suspicion and hate by the rest. Or perhaps a woman of the same tribe, but one who had done something to forfeit the trust of all the other women. A priestess who had violated taboo. A witch who had renounced witchcraft.

Abruptly his field of vision narrowed to the score pad. Evelyn Sawtelle was idly scribbling stick figures as Mrs. Carr deliberated over a lead. First the stick figure of a man with arms raised and three or four balls above his head, as if he were juggling. Then the stick figure of a queen, indicated by crown and skirt. Then a little tower with battlements. Then an L-shaped thing with a stick figure hanging from it—a gallows. Finally, a crude vehicle—a rectangle with two wheels—bearing down on a man whose arms were extended toward it in fear.

Just five scribbles. But Norman knew that four of them were connected with a bit of unusual knowledge buried somewhere in his mind. A glance at the exposed

dummy gave him the clue.

Cards.

But this bit of knowledge was from the ancient history of cards, when the whole deck was drenched with magic, when there was a Knight between the Jack and Queen, when the suits were swords, batons, cups, and money, and when there were twenty-two special tarot, or fortune-telling, cards in the pack, of which today only the Joker remained.

But Evelyn Sawtelle knowing about anything as recondite as tarot cards? Knowing them so well she doodled them? Stupid, affected, conventional Evelyn Sawtelle? It was unthinkable. Yet—four of the tarot cards were the Juggler, the Empress, the Tower, and the Hanged Man.

Only the fifth stick figure, that of the man and vehicle, did not fit in. Juggernaut? The fanatical, finally cringing victim about to die under the wheels of the vast, trundling idol? That was closer—and chalk one more up to the esoteric scholarship of stupid Evelyn Sawtelle.

SUDDENLY IT CAME TO HIM. Himself and a truck. A great big truck. That was the meaning of the fifth stick figure.

But Evelyn Sawtelle knowing his pet phobia?

He stared at her. She scratched out the stick figures and looked at him sullenly.

Mrs. Gunnison leaned forward, lips moving as if she might be counting trump.

Mrs. Carr smiled, and made her lead. The risen wind began to make the same intermittent roaring sound it had for a moment earlier in the evening.

Norman suddenly chuckled whistlingly, so that the three women looked at him. Why, what a fool he was! Worrying about witchcraft, when all Evelyn Sawtelle had been doodling was a child playing ball—the child she couldn't have; a stick queen—herself; a tower—her husband's office as chairman of the sociology department, or some other and more fundamental potency; a hanged man—Hervey's impotence (that was an ideal!); fearful man and truck—her own sexual energy horrifying and crushing Hervey.

He chuckled again, so that the three women lifted their eyebrows. He looked around at them enigmatically.

"And yet," he asked himself, continuing his earlier ruminations. in what was, at first, a much lighter vein, "why not?"

Three witch women using magic as Tansy had, to advance their husbands' careers and their own.

Making use of their husbands' special knowledge to give magic a modern twist. Suspicious and worried because Tansy had given up magic; afraid she'd found a much stronger variety and was

planning to make use of it.

And Tansy—suddenly unprotected, possibly unaware of the change in their attitude toward her because, in giving up magic, she had lost her sensitivity to the supernatural, her "woman's intuition."

Why not carry it a step further? Maybe all women were the same. Guardians of mankind's ancient customs and traditions, including the practice of witchcraft. Fighting their husbands' battles from behind the scenes, by sorcery. Keeping it a secret; and on those occasions when they were discovered, conveniently explaining it as feminine susceptibility to superstitious fads.

Half of the human race still actively practicing sorcery.

Why not?

"It's your play, Norman," said Mrs. Sawtelle, sweetly.

"You look as if you had something on your mind," said Mrs. Gunnison.

"How are you getting along up there, Norm?" her husband called. "Those women got you buffaloed?"

Buffaloed? Norman came back to reality with a jerk. That was just what they almost had done. And all because the human imagination was a thoroughly unreliable instrument, like a rubber ruler. Let's see, if he played his King it might set up a Queen in Mrs. Gunnison's hand so she could get in and run her spades.

(Continued on page 127)



THE FIRST STEP

JOHN K. DIOMEDE

*Beginning a new series of
classic horror in the grand tradition!*

One Hanson Square
Apt. 1A
New York, New York
November 15, 1936

Dear Ernst:

YOU MAY RECALL my good friend, Dr. Warm, who for the past several years has employed me as a general assistant in his strange ventures. It has been my privilege to observe him, to marvel at the feats of detection performed by his prodigious intellect, and to report on those same exploits from time to time. I am gratified, Ernst, that you are at least amused by my poor attempts at journalism, even though I know that you will ever be skeptical. So many of our adventures are so repugnant in my memory that I think it best that you fail to give them proper credence.

But now I know that this period of my career, so mixed in its blessings and experiences, is over for good and all. I send to you this last account (or, as you insist, "story"), with no other proof of its veracity than your sure knowledge that I could never be capable of inventing so tasteless and inelegant a fiction. I know, Ernst, that you will hear me out and, possibly, that the nature of the situation and its most horrible conclusion may be enough to convince you at last of the existence of the darker powers, those which you disown and which I have grown to recognize and fear so greatly.

Oftentimes these histories have concerned Dr. Warm's twin brother, Canfield, who, because of his own twisted reasons, or those implanted by whatever evil he owes allegiance, has on several occasions belligerently confronted my friend, his brother. Their contests have grown increasingly bitter; they began some years before ever I met Dr. Warm, in a rather youthful sort of jovial competition. Now they meet in fierce, deadly battles of will. Similar in appearance are they, although not so perfectly matched that a stranger would confuse them after an introduction. The brothers are tall, greater in stature than the average, and trim in figure. A deep love of sport and exercise has enabled them to maintain a vigor lacking in many fellows the same age, which is twentysix years.

Dr. Warm is quiet and slow in his movements, presenting an image of seriousness and intensity of purpose that never fails to arrest the attention of others in his vicinity. His hands are steady, his eyes do not waver from the focus of their scrutiny, and his body rests with unfeigned grace acquired years ago when he studied for the theater. Canfield, on the other hand, is loud and cordial, hiding within him the black motives grafted on his impressionable soul by his nameless demon. When he speaks, his hands fly about like tethered birds, and he often looks about to see that his

audience is following his argument. He laughs frequently, spicing his speech with anecdotes which his brother disdains as vulgar. Dr. Warm is dark, although his hair is beginning to lighten with gray and his beard is already nearly white. Canfield is fair, clean-shaven, with a complexion that borders on the ruddy. Indeed, were it not for the devil possessing him he would be the most likable of fellows, the merry sort one always finds arguing politics at the tavern.

But no, Canfield was not permitted to develop along those wholesome lines. That horrifying and *unclean* alliance that he formed years ago changed him permanently, so that even when he is his most charmingly urbane, when he jokes and laughs over his glass of sherry, some terrifying addition to his self is perfecting its schemes. His clear blue eyes are never without their vague intimations of buried corruption. That the eyes formerly belonged to Canfield but do no longer, is a fact as sad as it is repellent.

The last time that I saw Canfield was in a small country town named Kepton, situated among the rolling foothills of the Appalachians. The episode began quite innocently enough in our Manhattan apartments. We had received an invitation to holiday at the farm of Mr. Douglas Duelle. Duelle, you may recall, Ernst, is the same person who was involved in that

business with the Bourbonne manuscript some three years ago. Since the happy resolution of that affair we had not heard from him, and now it seemed that he had left his beloved Louisiana and purchased a small dairy farm up north. The letter was plainly without hint of urgency and, as Dr. Warm had been some time without a long, uninterrupted rest, I persuaded my friend to accept. From my previous letters you may imagine how much forceful reasoning that required!

BE THAT AS IT MAY, the very next morning saw me already preparing for the trip, and arranging for our affairs to be maintained in our absence. This in itself is a complex, though not difficult, procedure, thanks to the extensive underground network which Dr. Warm is careful to keep loyal to him; without it, Ernst, I assure you that this series of memoirs would have been considerably the shorter. I sent word around to various contacts and associates of the Fraternity, and within twenty-four hours we had confirmation that both Dr. Warm's current projects and our own personal effects would be minded during our leave. Naturally, even these precautions did little to ease Dr. Warm's concern, but soon he entertained the idea of a vacation with something more of enthusiasm, enough so that he *appeared* to forget his professional

interests for the time being.

At last we set out, taking an overnight express from Grand Central Station to Columbus, Ohio, and from there by motor coach to South Royalston. We had to hire a driver to taxi us to Kepton itself, which turned out to be a very charming though miniscule village near the Muskingum River. After a brief telephone conversation we were met by Mr. Douglas Duelle himself, who drove us even further into the country to his lovely new home.

Now, Ernst, I should like to give you a quick sketch of Mr. Duelle, for perhaps you do not place him immediately. When last we saw him he was quite heavy for his height and frame. He came barely up to Dr. Warm's breast, but no doubt weighed in at a good thirty pounds more than my friend. His hair was brilliantly red, as was his face, which he was forever mopping with a pocket handkerchief. Now, though, he seemed to have shed a good deal of that extra poundage, and looked uncommonly healthy; I believe that I remarked on this shortly thereafter to Dr. Warm. He replied that what was even more striking was that Mr. Duelle's hair had nearly totally disappeared, and that what remained was completely gray. I answered that I supposed it all had something to do with the unaccustomed exercise he must be receiving around the farm.

For two days after our arrival, then, we ourselves did nothing more energetic than travel from our quarters down the carpeted stairs to take our meals. It had been some time since I had allowed myself the luxury of total indolence, and his Guardian alone knows how long it had been since Dr. Warm had so completely relaxed. By the evening of the second day, Sunday, we had immersed ourselves entirely in the warm and hospitable tone of the Duelle household. Dr. Warm had brought with him a quantity of journals and unpublished papers which he had been meaning to read for some months; but the country atmosphere was so refreshingly calm that the briefcase remained unopened, and it was not I who was going to remind him to get back to work.

Sunday night saw a large storm move into the neighborhood, just before I left Dr. Warm and Mr. Duelle to go upstairs to bed. Indeed, I arose on Monday morning to the gentle sounds of the light rain which still fell, though without the fierce thunderstrokes which had delayed my falling asleep some hours before. Yet it was raining quite hard enough to postpone our tour of the environs. We had planned to motor into Kepton that morning after breakfast. Dr. Warm had expressed an interest in examining a truly rural and "unspoiled" district, and Mr. Duelle had responded with amused

alacrity. After the large morning meal the latter had excused himself, in order that he might complete some telephone calls so that our tourism, so unaccustomed in this part of the country, would not catch his neighbors completely unaware.

My friend beckoned to me after Mr. Duelle left the dining room. I moved around to the opposite side of the table where Dr. Warm was seated, and pulled a chair near to his so that we might talk in private. I had no idea what he might want to discuss here, where there was not to my mind the slightest taint of malignancy; but my friend always liked to talk things out whenever he felt the first clue. Not, I hasten to explain, that I was capable of any sort of cogent aid, but rather that he seemed to examine the oftentimes dismaying lack of evidence better out loud. My only purpose was to listen and nod, and I am not certain that he was actually aware of even this minimum of activity.

"My brother," he said. "Yes, John Canfield is here. Have you caught it?"

I must have shown my amazement in my expression, for he said, "Evidently not. It is a burden, John, to be so sensitive that the barest hint of evil stabs as sharply as a decaying tooth. But thank goodness that there *are* some of us who are that conscious of our foes. *They* have no limits on their strategies, as morality binds us; it

pays to be aware of their presence, even if we can't know precisely what they plan."

I had rarely seen Dr. Warm in so reflective and philosophic a mood. In all the years of our association, I don't believe that he ever spoke at such length in such a vein before. I said nothing, but waited for him to continue.

"**I KNOW NOW** what my feeling of *incompleteness* has meant. Three years ago, when we tidied up Mr. Duelle's previous blunder, I somehow felt unsatisfied, as if we were overlooking something dangerously important. Ever since then I have been troubled, on a subconscious level though it be, and at last now I have the chance to resolve it."

"Do you believe that Mr. Duelle himself is involved again?" I asked. Dr. Warm chewed his lower lip as he does when he begins to outline a significant investigation. He rose from the table and, standing, finished the last of the coffee in his cup. Holding the empty cup in his hand, he started to pace.

"I don't think our host plays any direct role, although it's far too early for me to sense specific details. Rather, I fear that the threat is more general in nature, not a single attack with a definite purpose, as it was in the previous case with Mr. Douglas Duelle and his unfortunate acquisition of the Bourbonne papers."

"Can I be of some service to you, or is it still premature?"

Dr. Warm turned to stare at me, his head cocked and his expression a rare display of affection. "Well, John, are you so eager to face the demons? How loyal you are! I should be lost without you."

I laughed. "I think not," I said.

"I cannot convince you, then. But, as you say, there is little that either of us may do now beside maintaining our usual vigilance."

"Thus goes our holiday," I said, shaking my head.

"I promise you another, then. But I need not point out that we have a sacred duty. 'Sacred' because so few are prepared to perform it, and we who *are* able must defend those slumbering others who little appreciate our efforts. What a changed world they would find if only we shirked our voluntary responsibility for a month."

Our further conversation was cut short by the reappearance of Mr. Duelle; he informed us that, though he himself had business elsewhere which could not be postponed, we would, if we liked, be entertained through the afternoon at the home of a close friend, a Mr. Lucas Shoreham. Mr. Duelle thought that we would like the opportunity to visit for a while with a true, native rural gentleman, rather than a transplanted novice such as himself. We agreed enthusiastically to the plan, and

when the rainstorm ceased Mr. Duelle packed us once more into his automobile; after a short, pleasant ride we arrived at the country residence of Mr. Lucas Shoreham. Duelle made introductions at the door and departed hastily to attend to his affairs, leaving us to the attention of Shoreham.

"Please come in, then," he said, and we followed him inside to his large, book-filled living room. His wife was introduced to us; her name was Janice, and she was a large, somewhat plain woman, nervous and constantly looking around for something to mend or straighten. She apologized continually for the untidy condition of her home, which in reality was unnecessary, as she kept a house so clean as to be antiseptic. While she greeted Dr. Warm and me her husband closed the door behind us, and the loud click of the lock made me start. I shot a doubtful glance at Dr. Warm who, apprehending the source of my misgivings, merely nodded slowly. I realized that I was to maintain my silence and pretend to notice nothing, interfering in no way with his appraisal of the situation.

"Come," said Shoreham, "let us sit down and talk. Douglas tells me you have come from New York just to visit." He led us to a large, overstuffed couch. Before we reached it Mrs. Shoreham was already there, tucking in the beige slipcover and plumping the

cushions. She smiled at us and made some remark about fetching the children. She left the room, evidently to do just that.

Dr. Warm replied to Shoreham's question, and I relaxed enough to examine the room in which we sat. It was spacious and comfortable, not furnished with an eye for modish fashion or luxurious style, but pleasant on its own terms of harmonious and practical good taste. There were shelves crammed with books, many more than one would expect within an isolated Ohio farm house; but having previously made the acquaintance of Mr. Douglas Duelle, and knowing what sort of friends he kept, I would have been far more surprised by their absence. At various places in the room (and the house, too, I had reason to believe) were candles of various colors and shapes: red heart-shaped candles, tall black tapers, white candles in the form of a cross, and others. These I assumed to be dressed with appropriate essential oils, and dedicated to a variety of Entities. Incense burned on the room's formal altar, and freshly-cut flowers filled several vases both there and around the chamber. The effect was one of comfortable, serious, and not unhappy devotion.

AFTER A SHORT TIME I heard the sounds of Janice Shoreham's return, and when I glanced at the doorway I believed

that I saw her and three children. But closer inspection informed me of my error: to my surprise I observed that she was accompanied by two young children and a chimpanzee, which was dressed in much the same manner as the small boy whose hand it held.

"A pet, Mr. Diomedes," said Mr. Lucas Shoreham, apparently noting my perplexity. "Much more companionable than a dog. He used to appear in an animal act in theatrical variety shows. I bought him because he's very well trained."

I nodded. "He gave me quite a start for a moment, there. Is his name Jimmy?" I asked, reading that legend on the bright red pullover which the chimp wore.

"Yes. But allow me to introduce my children." Shoreham held out his arms and the two children ran joyfully to him. They threw themselves into his lap and he hugged them for a moment. I exchanged a smile with my friend; this was happily not the sort of person that we were accustomed to meeting. Suddenly Dr. Warm's amused expression altered. I could not see any reason for this; although my friend's features were surely contorted by revulsion I was aware only of Mrs. Shoreham standing by the small ape in the doorway, and her children still in the arms of their father. I looked questioningly at Dr. Warm, whose face was now set in a contemplative

frown. He did not give me any sign or clue as to his thought, so once more I settled back helplessly to await developments. I have often regretted to you, Ernst, that I am not as talented or sensitive as my friend and employer, and therefore of severely limited use to him, despite all his protestations to the contrary.

Mr. Shoreham looked out from between his two small children. "This is Cheryl," he said, indicating the lovely little girl on his left knee. "She'll be ten years old next Tuesday. She's getting to be a young lady now." He kissed her forehead, and she laughed shyly.

"Am I big, Daddy?" asked the boy, whom I guessed to be five or six years old.

"Yes, you certainly are," said Shoreham, ruffling his son's hair. Shoreham looked up at us. "His name is Luke. He's going to be a space cadet."

"Go to the moon," said Luke belligerently.

"That's a fine ambition," said Dr. Warm in a curiously strained tone of voice.

Shoreham sat in the large easy chair with his two children on his knees. He bounced them for a moment and they laughed, and still I couldn't identify a possible source for my companion's consternation. After a short while Cheryl held out her hands toward her mother who, understanding the child's gesture, directed Jimmy the chimp across

the room. The ape lurched awkwardly across the carpet, turning a half-circle in front of Shoreham's chair and coming to a stop facing the davenport shared by Dr. Warm and myself. Cheryl hopped down from her father's knee to join Jimmy.

At last I felt an indication of the uneasiness that Dr. Warm had detected earlier. Not until the girl grasped the chimp's hands in her own did I truly perceive the atmosphere of potential menace, but when finally I did there was no denying the intensity of the threatening aura.

"Where did you say that you obtained the monkey?" I asked.

"From a friend who has contacts with certain theatrical agencies," said Shoreham. He looked at me curiously, and Dr. Warm gave me a warning look, so I merely nodded in embarrassment. I suppose that I had wanted to ascertain whether Shoreham had purchased Jimmy from Canfield, or possibly one of Canfield's operators. No doubt Dr. Warm had been thinking along these rather obvious lines himself, but to much greater purpose, and suddenly I saw that I had come close to spoiling whatever tactic he might be planning.

The atmosphere in the room was becoming unbearably tense. I was resolved not to utter another syllable until I could be certain of Dr. Warm's intentions, and of my part in them. The children and the

ape were chasing each other about the living room, and Mrs. Shoreham was chiding them in a more or less helpless fashion. To my horror I noticed that Mr. Lucas Shoreham was staring at me, waiting for me to say something in reply to his last remark. I felt a deep urge to speak; at first I thought it was only my natural loquacity. Then, as the impulse grew more insistent, I tried to convey my distress to Dr. Warm. I was besieged by a terrifying desire, as though some unknown will had invaded my person and was even now crumbling my mental defenses from within. I felt my face flush and my eyes bulge with the effort to keep still. My blood roared in my ears, and a sensation of indescribable loathing filled me. I half rose from my seat, intending to rush from the room before I was forced to reveal ourselves to the unseen enemy. I could move no further. A horrid pressure, originating I knew not where, held me fast. I was helpless. In but another instant I would bring ruin on myself and my friend.

ONCE MORE I WAS RESCUED by the quickness of Dr. Warm's perceptions. A mere second before I must speak, he rose from his chair and casually walked about the living room. "Quite a few candles you have, Mr. Shoreham," he said. The moment he spoke I felt the pressure disappear, along with

the terrifying feeling of violation. "I can see from their forms and placement that you, like Mr. Duelle, are a student of certain arcane texts."

"Indeed, Dr. Warm. There are many forces of which it is always wisest to be aware. There are too many people these days who care nothing for the great powers which hold our meager lives, even as we might toy with a blind and stupid insect."

"Exactly," said Dr. Warm. "I am surprised on that account to find *two* men with that insight, so far removed from the centers of the Fraternal learning."

"It is not so strange," said Shoreham. "Although one may follow the ancient precepts for the protection of himself and his family, it does not mean that he must devote himself entirely to the role of factor, as you have done. I will live my own life, but I will do it with proper respect for those nameless forces."

"A shame, Mr. Shoreham, if I may say it," said Dr. Warm. "Surely you must understand how greatly the world could use another knowledgeable defender."

"Not everyone shares your dedication," said Shoreham.

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Dr. Warm. There was another silence, during which Jimmy the ape turned from its play with Cheryl and Luke, and began walking straight toward my chair.



With every step it took, I felt an increase of the fear of a few minutes before. It shambled closer, and presently I felt a need to scream or else be driven mad on the spot. Again Dr. Warm sensed the seriousness of the situation. "I will wish to talk to you again," he said to Shoreham. "I hope to change your ideas a little, before our short holiday is ended."

The monkey stopped at the sound of Dr. Warm's voice. It spun around and headed toward Shoreham. The growing wave of repulsion did not abate; I rose from my chair and stumbled out of the room. I heard Shoreham speak. "I doubt that you can, my friend," he said. Dr. Warm followed me quickly. Now, as each pace lengthened the distance between myself and the occupants of the living room, I felt my head clear. In a few seconds I had regained my self-possession. Dr. Warm put his hand on my shoulder and spoke softly, so that the Shorehams would not overhear.

"Yes," he said, "I know what you've been going through. I've had a difficult time myself. I am astounded at your control, for you have neither my special training nor mental defenses."

"I feel wretched," I said.

"No doubt. Nevertheless, you displayed the iron resolve of a Senior Frater under that attack. There is more to you, John, than you have ever admitted to yourself."

"All that I know is that the sooner we leave this house, the safer I shall feel about my sanity."

"Agreed," said Dr. Warm. "I shall ask Shoreham about returning to the house of Mr. Duelle. It will not be difficult to construct some plausible excuse."

"Thank you." I was improving rapidly; my heartbeat had slowed nearly to its normal rate, and my head no longer felt as though it had been filled with cotton wool. We walked slowly, away from the living room toward the back of the house. Unescorted by any member of the family, I was uneasy about making an impromptu tour of their house. But neither Dr. Warm nor myself desired to return to that chamber of obscure dread. I felt like the most boorish of intruders as we walked along the carpeted hallway. Apparently the kitchen was at the end of the corridor; to the left was a large, dim dining room, and to the right was a sort of sewing room or children's game room. It was my guess that Dr. Warm wished to go outside through a back door. Before we found one, however, Shoreham caught up to us and clapped us both on the shoulder.

"Looking for the lav?" he asked. His voice was jovial enough, but when I turned to look at him his expression was dark and grim.

"I'm sorry," said Dr. Warm. "I wanted to walk around a bit outdoors. I really haven't seen much of country life, you know, and I didn't

want to disturb you or your lovely family."

"Quite all right," said Shoreham. "I have a few chores to attend to now; feel free to poke around wherever you like. Why don't you take a look in the barn? We have a few beautiful horses, if you have any interest in the animals. I'll join you as soon as I can." He indicated the back door, which we could now see as we entered the Shorehams' kitchen. Then without another word he turned and left us.

I DESPERATELY WANTED to breathe the fresh air again. I hurried to the screen door and preceded my friend through. The rain had scrubbed the sky clean, and now even the smallest tatters of cloud were disappearing over the horizon. The sky was deep blue, with a golden sun hanging halfway down in the west. The breeze was crisp, and I felt it wash away the tendrils of horror that, in my imagination, still clung to me. I paused to allow Dr. Warm to join me; he, too, looked less oppressed beneath nature's unsullied precinct.

"I'm glad to get out of there, let me tell you," I said. We strolled slowly about the yard. Dr. Warm's excuse had been no mere pretext, for in fact he did entertain a curiosity about the details of farm life.

"I sometimes feel that we who have chosen to shut ourselves away in cities have somehow

transgressed the Diamond Way by doing so," he said wistfully. "Perhaps it was intended for man to make his living this way." He indicated the farm, taking in with his gesture the fields and livestock. I nodded in agreement. We stood gazing at Shoreham's small garden, in which he grew various vegetables for the family's own consumption; beyond that were the cultivated acres which brought in the major portion of Shoreham's income. Behind us we heard shrill laughter; at once I felt a surge of panic. My friend and I turned and, believe me, Ernst, when I saw the children and that cursed ape, my knees nearly gave way. It was all that I could do to keep from crying out.

"That beast!" said Dr. Warm, in a peculiar low, growling voice.

"Yes," I said. "Do you know, it was not my own wish to ask that foolish question before. Some damnable influence seemed to take control, to force me into the most destructive path possible."

"I know," said Dr. Warm. "No apology is needed. Stay here, then, for you are not shielded as I am. I must investigate this further." I began to tell him to be careful, but caught my tongue. Dr. Warm knew well the dangers he courted.

He hurried after the boy and girl, into the large gray barn. I could hear shreds of laughter across the fifty or so yards between the building and my position. Twice I

attempted to approach the barn, but on each occasion I gave up the attempt before I had covered half the distance. I could not stand up against the massive psychic attack which seemed to emanate from Jimmy the ape.

I waited helplessly by the Shorehams' vegetable garden, listening with mounting anxiety to the now-hysterical shrieks which came from within the barn. I could not learn whether Dr. Warm had safely hidden himself, or if the juvenile cries had a more sinister origin. With that demonic Jimmy in their midst, the young boy and girl might be led to the vilest acts imaginable. The shrill laughter and incoherent screams continued for some ten minutes. Then, when I thought I could stand it no longer, there was a sudden silence. I was startled; a few seconds later I tried once more to join my friend in the barn but, despite the lack of frenzied noise, I could not yet approach the building that concealed the simian devil. Ernst, I don't believe that I can ever convey to you the utter abhorrence I felt for that animal, or the air of sheer malevolence that surrounded it. To attempt to put those feelings into words is to risk losing my credibility through excessive hyperbole. You have known me for quite a number of years; I trust your sure knowledge of my character to witness now the depth of my emotion. A few minutes passed

thus in a tense quiet. I confess that my own doubts were beginning to rage out of control. I was at the point of returning to the house and confronting Shoreham, when a ghastly noise of pain and terror split the country air. It was no human scream; no, it sounded to my inexperienced ears like the demented bray of a panic-stricken horse. Immediately thereafter I heard again the strident cries of the children. I heard also the voice of Dr. Warm, raised now in some furious passion. I could not understand his words, but his tone was grim and commanding. The children and Jimmy ran from the barn; I was sickened to see the fronts of their smocks soaked red, and their hands and arms and faces smeared with the sticky blood of their father's horse. Dr. Warm ran after them. He halted in the middle of the farmyard, exhausted by the psychic battle he had recently waged. He, too, had been somewhat fouled by the tortured beast's blood, and on his face was an expression of loathing the life of which I hope never again to see in this world. I ran across the short distance that separated us, catching him just as his legs buckled.

"No, John," he said weakly, "let me sit here in the dust. I cannot go anywhere for the moment."

"Certainly," I said, easing him to the ground. I sat with him, quietly waiting for his faculties to restore themselves.

"You can never know the fullest extent of that chimpanzee's malignity. You, in your less sensitive capacity, are spared that complete knowledge. I envy you that."

"Still," I said, "I can sense an approximation. This is something new in our experience, is it not? Where is Canfield? We have never met anything quite like this before. Whenever there has been the merest indication of demonic influence, it has come always and only from Canfield."

"EXACTLY," said Dr. Warm. "Our enemy has learned a dangerous trick. My brother Canfield has been our most devoted enemy; in fact, he has been our *only* true adversary, the sole agent of the Consele Oscury in the New World. Perhaps we have only ourselves to blame for this new development. Perhaps those forces of the Consele would have been satisfied with its slow progress through Canfield, if we hadn't interfered. But we *did* interfere, and successfully. If the Consele has grown frustrated, we can look forward to an acceleration in its attacks. And the signs point to a new phase in the war. Canfield is no longer the single focus of their energies. Though the situation here in Kepton bears my brother's stamp, it is not through him alone that the evil is aroused. From now on we must fight a pernicious influence, that leaps from one un-

suspecting mortal mind to another, like a cirulent cancer or a hidden, disgusting plague."

"There is nothing for it but to carry the fight onward ourselves," I said.

"That's the spirit we need!" cried Dr. Warm, smiling. "Courage, John, and we'll beat them yet. It will be harder, now. From this day forward we'll never again be certain where the corruption will appear next. Who knows how long the good members of the Shoreham family have been under Canfield's spell? We must do all we can to minimize his power and influence."

"It's that horrible ape," I said. "I'd give anything if—"

"Quiet, now," said Dr. Warm. We had been walking slowly back to the house, as Dr. Warm had somewhat recovered. He clutched my elbow and pulled me around the corner of the building.

"What—"

"Be still," he whispered. We stood there for a moment, pressed against the flat planking of the house. I could hear nothing. After a while Dr. Warm peered cautiously around the corner. I heard him mutter something. He slowly moved back toward me and indicated that I should look. I braced myself against the building and stretched until I could gaze at the scene that so upset my friend.

The back porch was around the corner of the house, about twenty

feet from our position. I saw Mrs. Janice Shoreham on the porch, holding a live chicken. In one hand she had two large, black iron hooks. As I stared in horrified fascination, she took one of the heavy hooks and stabbed it through the fleshy part of the poor bird's wings. The chicken immediately set up a frantic cackling, but Mrs. Shoreham paid no attention. She pushed the second hook through the other wing; then she lifted the bird by the two gaffs and hung the other ends of the hooks over a clothesline. All this time the doomed chicken was thrashing and squawking in a raucous and thoroughly futile manner.

I saw Mrs. Shoreham grab the scaly legs of the chicken and pull them to their fullest extension. Holding the legs with one hand, she reached into her apron and removed a long kitchen knife that gleamed in the bloody rays of the setting sun. I could not look away, Ernst. I knew then what was going to happen, but for the life of me I couldn't turn my eyes aside. Mrs. Shoreham raised the huge carving knife over her head. I heard a peculiar ululating cry, an unearthly, inhuman sound that raised the bumps on my skin. I would not believe that the monstrous noise could originate in one as wholesome-looking as Mrs. Shoreham, and my instinct was proven correct. As her arm swung down toward the helpless chicken, I

caught a glimpse of a small, hirsute shape beside her on the porch. It was Jimmy the ape. With a single vicious cut Mrs. Shoreham opened the unlucky fowl, splashing herself and the grotesque beast beside her with the chicken's gore. At that moment I felt again the presence of horror too maddening for a man to know. Gasping, I fled back around the corner.

"It's just as well," said Dr. Warm, who took my place as spy. "You would not wish to see what that woman is doing with the living entrals." I was vitiated by the experience. I could not stand; I crouched on the ground, sobbing to myself, hoping that the moment might pass as speedily as possible. At last I felt Dr. Warm's hand on my shoulder. I looked up; it was dusk already, and the terrors of the afternoon seemed remote. I sighed and stood up. The two of us went into the house, intending to use the Shorehams' telephone to call Mr. Douglas Duelle. We wanted to remain in that cursed house no longer.

The house was darkened. Outside, the first faint flush of stars was appearing in the sky, but no lights had yet been turned on in the Shoreham home. We made our way through the kitchen and down the hallway; I stumbled once in the gloom, knocking against a small table. The candles which rested on its surface had been extinguished. A moment later I bumped against

Dr. Warm, who had halted in the corridor. He was listening to some strange sounds originating from the game room. The chamber's door was shut, and no beam of light escaped from beneath the portal. The sounds grew louder and more unnerving. "This is no place for you," said Dr. Warm briskly. "What transpires beyond that door makes the activities of the children and their mother seem like Sunday school piety. This is the master of the house at his devotions, he who once was Lucas Shoreham. I will attend to it. You must find the telephone and call Duelle at once." I said not a word, but hurried to do his bidding. Behind me I heard the door to the utility room open and then close. I did not look back.

I FOUND THE TELEPHONE after some agonizing stumbling in the dark. The operator connected me with the Duelle residence. I heard the phone ring several times; my worries grew while I prayed that Douglas Duelle would answer my summons. At last I heard the voice of his housekeeper, Mrs. Vorsecky. She apologized, saying that Duelle was not at home, but that she would give him my message when he returned. I impressed on her the urgency of the situation and hung up. There was nothing to do but wait. The mad sounds coming from the utility room were growing ever louder, and the intangible sense of peril had me near-

ly overcome once again. When I had nearly reached the point of nervous collapse, I heard the sound of an automobile stopping outside the Shorehams' house. "Duelle, at last," I thought. "Together let us end this horror." I went to the front door and looked out into the darkness. I saw a man emerge from a car and walk up the gravel path.

It was Dr. Warm's diabolic brother, Canfield.

"Good evening, my dear Diomedel!" he called cheerfully. "Have you been enjoying your day with Luke and Janice?"

"Canfield!" I said, my voice somewhat strangled with fear, for both my own person and the safety of Dr. Warm. "What have you done to these innocent folk? Surely this new strategy of yours shall earn you a favored spot in Hell. I hope you will not be too distressed to learn that your brother is working successfully to throw off the pall of evil you've cast over this household."

"Diomedel, you are a great fool. My brother, with his superior intellect and erudition, is infinitely worse. Stand aside, for I must set his bunglings to right."

"I won't let you pass, Canfield," I said. It was heroic, perhaps, but even as my enemy stated, it was unwise to stand in his way. He shook his head sadly and raised one hand. I saw nothing, neither did I hear a sound; but my whole body

seemed to be on fire. I tried to scream in the sheer torment of the spell in which Canfield had bound me; I learned that I couldn't utter a sound or move a fraction of an inch. I was helpless, tortured by a consuming fire from within. Canfield paid me no heed, but opened the door and walked past me, toward the scene of Dr. Warm's struggle with Lucas Shoreham.

I fought to free myself, without success. I knew that Dr. Warm, concentrating as he was on Shoreham, would be vulnerable to Canfield's attack. My own extreme pain was slowly driving me out of my mind, but I still realized the catastrophic efforts that would result, should Canfield choose this most inopportune of moments to strike at Dr. Warm.

I had little time to pursue these thoughts. Even as I considered them, Canfield was walking down the dimly-lit hallway. Several seconds later he ran back past me, flinging open the screen door and racing down the steps and around the house toward the barn. The further he ran, the less was the effect of his virulent charm. A second or two after he ran by he was followed by his brother. Dr. Warm's face was swollen and bruised, and his clothing was tattered and smeared with foul stains. He seemed almost physically and emotionally exhausted, but still he gave chase. I could but weakly indicate the direction Canfield had

fled; as Dr. Warm passed, I staggered after. He turned to face me, his breathing ragged and his voice a mere whisper. "Stay," he said, panting. "You cannot aid me now." Then he turned and ran after Canfield.

I WALKED DOWN the steps and around the house. I had to support myself against the corner of the building. In the darkness I could make out the form of my friend, just before he dashed into the ominous, shadowed barn. For several minutes I witnessed an incredible display of uncanny lights, flashes, and flames, as Dr. Warm and Canfield battled each against the will and occult skills of the other. I was powerless to help. Their conflict had moved onto a new and, for me at least, inaccessible plane; I could only watch and pray. Then the disturbing blazes of power subsided. I thought that perhaps the fight was over, that one or the other had finally emerged triumphant. I was wrong. I heard a strange rushing sound, like a strong wind beating through the dead leaves of autumn. Then there was a tremendous explosion, a violent discharge of forces that blinded me for several seconds. But the eerie thing was that it was entirely silent. The huge flash of light, the boiling clouds of orange and black smoke, the raging fires, the total destruction of the barn occurred in utter stillness. A wave of heat swept over

me, and I retreated around the corner of the house.

The smoke and heat stung my eyes, but the tears that found their way down my cheeks were owed to other causes. I knew that no living thing could have survived that holocaust. The world was rid of its chief antagonist, but at too dear a cost.

After a few moments I went back into the Shorehams' house. I turned on the lights; everything inside seemed normal. The aura of corrosive evil had disappeared. I called out, but no one answered. I searched the entire house, room by room, but I discovered no one. Lucas Shoreham, his wife Janice, the children Luke and Cheryl, and the damned ape, Jimmy, were missing; nor have they ever been seen since. At last I went outside again; I got into the automobile in which Canfield had arrived, and drove inexpertly to the Duelle farm.

Mr. Douglas Duelle was as stunned and grieved as I, when I had outlined the events of the day to him. "It was as if the brothers had achieved some mysterious balance," he said. "Their powers, one for good, the other for hideous evil, could not abide the existence of the rival. It may be that these last few years your own presence had given the force for good a slight advantage. But with the meeting in the territory of an additional corrupt influence, all quantities were at last cancelled out in

one immense explosion."

I would not be consoled by such a thought. I had lost the best of friends. The world had lost the strongest of allies. Three days later, still in the blackest of moods, I was taken to the station in Columbus by Duelle. He shook my hand and offered me his hospitality whenever I should again feel the need of escaping the city. I thanked him, and began my long, lonely ride back to New York.

It had been several weeks since that final, disastrous conflict, Ernst; only now have I felt up to writing you about it. Of course, I hope that now you may begin to have more serious thoughts about the matters I have discussed in these letters; I doubt, however, whether I should ever been successful in making the world at large consider them with any degree of solemn reflection. Dr. Warm always said that we are but tokens in a battle between two immense powers. The power for evil wishes to change us, causing first our total degradation and then our destruction. The power for good wishes also to change us, but to a higher and purer way of life. Persons who cling to things as they are, who seek no such improvement of the race of mankind, are not as neutral as they imagine. No, it is clear that human beings will not be permitted such ignorant indifference. A choice *must* be made, and if it is not for good then it *must* be for evil; a decision to remain the

same is a decision for corruption and eventual death. Dr. Warm repeatedly said that the devil's greatest victory was in making people doubt his existence. Thus, the so-called Dark Ages may have been humanity's finest hour, and these "scientific" centuries may be the last, senile gasps of a doomed species.

With the extinction of Canfield, you may be inclined to suggest that a great flood of evil will be ended in the world. Herr Hitler, you may think, may now have lost his best advisor, and we have reason to celebrate therefore. It is not so. Before his death, Canfield bequeathed his blight of hatred to all the world, as he did among the Shoreham family. It spreads now, so that even with his removal, Canfield's influence still operates. Hitler will be checked, if at all, only by a concentrated exercise of will

among free men *everywhere*. Certainly, the world has known iniquity in good measure before; but now the forces of evil have found an unequalled means of expression. The ranks of the destroyers increase every day. We shall see how this affair in Europe turns out. But I warn you, no matter what that terrifying man with the Chaplin mustache accomplishes, he will not be the end of it. Our real battle just begins.

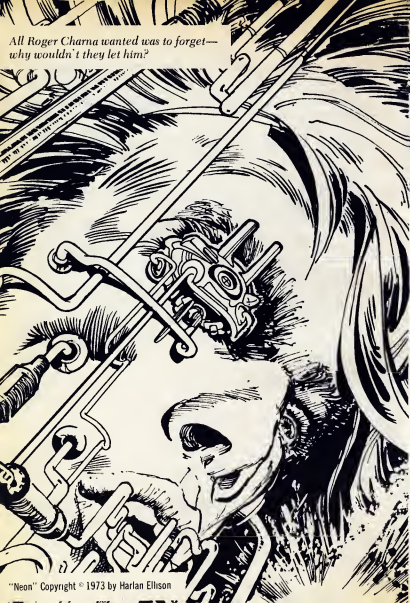
AFTER THESE THOUGHTS, I can tell you how much joy I felt to learn that you and Gretchen plan to be married. I hope for your sakes that your union and our world will be blessed with a spirit of co-operation and virtue.

As always,

John

□





All Roger Charna wanted was to forget—
why wouldn't they let him?



NEON HARLAN ELLISON

TRULY CONCERNED whether or not he would live, the surgeons labored for many hours over Roger Charna. They cryogenically removed the pain areas in his anterior hypothalamic nucleus, and froze parts of him to be worked on later. Finally, it seemed they would be successful, and he would live. They bestowed on him three special gifts to this end: a collapsible metal finger, the little finger of the left hand; a vortex spiral of neon tubing in his chest, it glowed bright red when activated; and a right eye that came equipped with sensors that fed informational load from both the infrared and ultraviolet ends of the spectrum.

He was discharged from the hospital and tried to reestablish the life-pattern he'd known before the accident, but it was useless. Ruth's family had sent her abroad and he had the feeling she had been more than anxious to go. She could not have helped seeing the Sunday supplement piece on the operation. His employers at the apartment house had been pleasant, but they made good sense when they said as a doorman he was useless to them. They gave him a month's termination wages.

He had no difficulty getting another job, happily enough. The proprietors of a bookstore on Times Square felt he was a marvelous publicity item, and they hired him on the spot. He worked the seven o'clock to three a.m. shift, selling paperbacks and souvenirs to tourists and the

NEON

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theater crowd.

The first message he had from her was in the light-flesh of the *Newsweek* sign on the other side of 46th Street. He was sweeping out the front of the bookstore when he looked up and saw ROGER! UP HERE! ROGER! spelled out in the rapidly changing lights. It spasmed and changed and became an advertisement for timely news. He blinked and shook his head. Then he saw the crimson spiral shining through his shirt, flickering on and off. There was a soft cotton candy feeling in his stomach. He swept the cigarette butts and dustballs furiously . . . out onto the sidewalk and across the sidewalk and into the gutter. He walked back to the bookstore, looking up and over his shoulder only as he stepped through the doorway. The sign was as he had always seen it before. Nothing strange there.

At his dinner break, he walked to the papaya stand near the corner of 42nd and Broadway and stood at the counter chatting with Caruso (which was not his name, but because he wanted to become an opera singer and went into the basement of the juice stand and sang arias from *Il Trovatore* and *I Pagliacci*, that was the name by which he was known).

"How do you feel?" Caruso asked him.

"Oh, I'm okay. I'm a little tired."

"You been to the doctor?"

"No. They said I didn't need to come around unless I hurt or something seemed wrong."

"You got to take care of yourself. You can't fool around with your health, yeah?" He was genuinely concerned.

"How're you?" Roger Charna asked. Caruso wrapped the semi-transparent square of serrated-edged paper around the hot dog and handed the bunned frank to him. Charna reached for the plastic squeeze-bottle of mustard.

"Couldn't be better," Caruso said. He drew off a large papaya juice and slid it across the counter. "I'm into Gilbert & Sullivan. *Pirates of Penzance*. I hear there's a big Gilbert & Sullivan revival coming on."

ROGER CHARNA ate without making a reply. He felt very sorry for Caruso. When he had first met him, the boy was not quite twenty, working at the stand, high hopes for a singing career. Now he was going to fat, his hair was thinning prematurely, and the dreams were only warm-bed whispers to impress the girls Caruso hustled off Times Square. It would come to nothing. Ten years from now, should Roger come back, he knew Caruso would still be there, singing in the basement, pulling 25-cent slices of pizza from the big Grimaldi oven, filling the sugar jars, carrying cases of Coke syrup downstairs to be stored, the dreams

losing their color, gravity pulling it all down.

Then he realized *he* might still be on Times Square, ten years from now. The pity backed up in its channel and washed over him.

The 7-Up sign winked once and began pulsing. His chest spiral picked up the beat. Pain hit him. Roger looked up and the sign was flickering on and off. His chest spiral had changed color, now pulsed deep blue in synch with the 7-Up sign, right through his shirt. The girl on the sign moved smoothly and directly to stare down at him. Her mouth began moving. Roger Charna could not read lips.

"Caruso." The counterman turned from re-loading the hot dog broiler and smiled. "Huh?" Roger pointed across the street, up at the 7-Up sign. "Take a look over there and tell me what you see." Caruso moved to the end of the counter and stared up. "What?" Roger pointed to the sign. "The sign, the 7-Up sign." Caruso looked again. "What am I supposed to see?" Roger sighed and finished his hot dog. "I think I'll go see the doctor tomorrow morning."

"You got to take care of yourself. You been a very sick guy, yeah?"

Roger nodded and laid out the coins in payment for the dog and papaya. Caruso pushed them back with the heel of his hand. "Iss onna house." Roger found himself still nodding.

The coins back in his pants

pocket, he walked up Broadway to the bookstore, wishing the *New York Times* still had its neon newsservice on the island at 42nd Street.

It might all come clear if whoever was trying to reach him had free access to unlimited language.

By this time Roger knew either someone was trying to talk to him, or he was going insane. Odds were bad.

HE WAS INVITED to a party. He went because they asked him. He paid a dollar at the door: a woman who had had her left breast removed for what he found out later were carcinogenic reasons, took the money. She was topless; she smiled a great deal. He also discovered, later in the evening, that these people had answered an advertisement in an underground newspaper. It had been headed with a photograph from Tod Browning's *Freaks*—pinhead twins joined at the rump. Roger did not feel at ease with them:

In the group was a man who sought carnal knowledge of blimps. He had been arrested three times for trying to *shtup* the Goodyear dirigible. Even among his own kind he was looked on with distaste; unable to find the species of sex partners his pathology demanded, he had grown steadily more perverted and had taken to attacking helicopters; the mere men-

tion of an autogyro gave him a noticeable erection.

He was offered a sloe gin fizz in a pink frosted glass by a young woman who removed her glass eye and sucked on it while discussing the moral imperatives of the sponge boycott in Brooksville, Florida. She rolled the eye around on her tongue and Roger walked away quickly.

"The dollar was for the spaghetti," explained a man with a prosthetic arm and a leather cone where his nose should have been. "My wife would have told you about that when she invited you, because you're a celebrity and we certainly don't want to charge *you*, but if we made an exception, well, *everyone* would want the dollar back. But you can have as much spaghetti as you want." He pulled the cone forward on its elastic band and scratched at the raw, red scar-tissue beneath. "Actually, I'll tell you what: come on in the bathroom for a couple of minutes and I can slip the buck back to you, they'll never know." Roger slipped sidewise around the bookcase and left the man scratching.

THE ROOM was rather nice, large and airy, filled with kinetic sculptures and found object constructs that covered the walls and dominated the floor space. There were half a hundred light paintings of bent neon rubing and fluorescent designs. They looked expensive. Roger wondered why his

dollar was necessary.

Seven people were seated at the feet of a moon-faced woman perched on a three-legged aluminum stool. The entire left side of her face was blotched with a huge strawberry birthmark. She had a coatimundi on her shoulder; it was nibbling leaves of lettuce she had safety-pinned to her dress like epaulets.

A man who bore a startling resemblance to a plucked carrion bird, snagged Roger's arm as he moved toward the front door. He stammered hideously. "Uh . . . uh . . . uh . . ." he babbled, till something snapped in his right cheek and he launched into a convoluted diatribe that began with a confession of his having been defrocked as a molecular biologist, veered insanely through a recitation of the man's affection for Bermuda shorts, and reached a far horizon at which he said, with eyes rolling: "Now everybody doesn't know this," and he pulled Roger closer, "but the universe, the entire frigging universe is going to collapse around everyone's ears in just seventy-two billion years. I smoke a lot."

Roger skinned loose, and turning, thumped against a dwarf who had been surreptitiously trying to look up the skirt of a young woman with a harelip. "Excuse me," Roger said, assisting the dwarf to his feet. He brushed him off and started to move, but the dwarf had thrown

both arms around Roger's leg. "They remaindered me," the dwarf said, rather pathetically. "Before, I swear *before* the damned book had a chance, they remaindered me. Can you perceive the pain, the exquisite pain of being carried into Marboro's on Third and seeing a stack, a virtual, a veritable, I mean motherGod a phallic Annapurna mountain of copies of the finest, what I mean the sincerest study of the anopheles mosquito ever written. That book was a work of love, excuse me for using the word but I mean to say *ardor*; and those butchers at Doubleday, those mau-maus, my *God*, they're vivisectionists, for Pete's sake . . . if he were alive today, Ferdinand deLesseps would absolutely *whirl* in his grave."

"I have to go to the bathroom," Roger said, trying to pry his leg loose. The dwarf unwound and sat there looking frayed. Roger smiled self-consciously and moved away. He started back for the door.

Everything dropped into the ultra-violet.

The little finger of his left hand began to resonate with the tinny voice of Times Square Caruso hashing out *I'm Called Little Buttercup* as the neon spiral in his chest gave him a shock and began flickering in gradually bloodier shades of crimson. Caruso segued into Kurt Weill's *Pirate Jenny*, a tune Roger was certain the papaya juice stand attendant had never

heard.

The ultra-violet smelled purple; it sounded like the nine-pound hammers of Chinese laborers striking the rails of the Union Pacific Railroad; it sprang out as auras and halos and nimbuses around everyone in the room; Roger clutched his chest.

His eyes rolled up in his head and the images burned there like the braziers of Torquemada's dungeons. He blinked and his eyes rolled down again bringing with them images as burning bright as the crosses of Ku Klux Klansmen in Selma, Alabama: it was all in his right eye. He feared what lay ahead in the infrared. But that never happened; it was all in the ultra-violet.

THE ROOM BURNED around the edges, deep purple and a kind of red that he realized—with some embarrassment—matched up only with the red just inside the slit in the head of his penis during his recurring bouts with prostatitis. Every neon sculpture and fluorescent painting in the room was jangling at him. A half a hundred roadsigns to someone who was trying to talk to him. *I believe I'm a closet psychotic*, he thought, but nothing stopped.

The neon tubes on the walls writhed with the burning edges of the soft-boiled sun as it bubbled down into the black horizon. They re-formed and slopped color words

of pink and vermillion across the airy walls.

ROGER, YOU'RE MAKING IT MURDER TO GET THROUGH TO YOU.

He tried running but all the movement was inside his skin; none of it got to the outside.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU PREFER THE COMPANY OF THESE DISGUSTING PERVERTS. LOOK, I LOVE YOU, THAT'S THE LONG, THE SHORT AND THE COLOR OF IT, ROGER. WHAT SAY?

His metal little finger was singing the bell song from *Lakme* and he hated it. His chest spiral was bubbling and he had the immediate fear his shirt would catch fire. All the women in the room were frozen in place, their hair vibrating like cilia, each strand standing up and away individually, emitting purple sparks like St. Elmo's Fire. The men looked like X-rays of rickets cases.

"Who are you?" Roger said in a choked voice.

I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK. I'M THE RIGHT WOMAN FOR YOU. GOD KNOWS YOU'VE HAD A CRUMMY TIME OF IT, AND I'M SENT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU. IT'S THE REAL LOVE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, ROGER.

"Where are you?"

RIGHT HERE. IN THE LIGHTS.

"I'm going to be sick."

RIGHT HERE. COME ON, ROGER, JUST FIRM UP NOW!

"Haven't I suffered enough already?"

ROGER, SELF-PITY JUST WON'T GET IT. IT'S TRUE YOU'VE SUFFERED, AND THAT'S WHY YOU WIN THE LOTTERY OF LOVE WITH ME, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO STOP BEING MAUDLIN ABOUT IT.

"Not only am I a put-together thing, a righteous freak, but now I'm going completely insane."

ROGER, WILL YOU HAVE A LITTLE TRUST, FOR GOD'S SAKE? I'M PART OF THE REPAYMENT FOR WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU. ALL IT TAKES IS BELIEF AND A COUPLE OF STEPS

He felt his right hand groping in the empty air around his right side—while his left hand sang *Pace Pace Mio Dio* from *La Forza Del Destino*—and he came up with an aquamarine Italian marble egg.

"Listen, I think you're terrific," Roger said, playing for time.

YOU'RE PLAYING FOR TIME.

She's on to me, Roger thought desperately. He flung the Italian marble egg at the neon wall-sculptures, it struck, geysers of sparks erupted, a curtain caught fire, a woman's dress went up in a puff of Gucci, people began shrieking, the ultra-violet dissipated in an instant, everything returned to normal, Roger was scared out of his mind . . . and he

ran out of there as fast as he could.

His finger had grown hoarse, and finally shut up.

ROGER CALLED IN SICK and begged off work for a few days. They were understanding, but the big Labor Day weekend was coming up, they'd laid in a large stock of Sicilian switchblades and copies of the steamier works of Akbar Del Piombo and Anonymous in the *Travelers' Companion* series, and they expected him—neon coil, weird eye and metal finger included—on the ready line when the marks, kadodies and reubens fresh from Michigan's Ionia State Fair descended on sinful Times Square. Roger mumbled various okays and went for extended walks along the night-hot Hudson River Drive.

The big Spry sign blinking across the Hudson from Jersey caught his eye.

YOU ARE THE DAMNEDEST, MOST OBSTINATE HUMAN BEING I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED, said the Spry sign, forming words it was clearly incapable of forming.

Roger began running . . . blindly along the breakwater. The sign gave him no peace. It continued jabbering at him. ROGER! FOR CRINE OUT LOUD, ROGER, WILL YOU STOP JUST A MOMENT AND LISTEN TO ME!

He ran up West 114th Street, stumbling over a gentleman of the evening who was lying half in, half

out of the doorway of an apartment building. Roger excused himself and would have waited for a response to make sure he had not damaged the fellow, but the man had somehow gotten his tongue stuck deep inside the neck of an empty Boone's Farm Apple Wine bottle, and speech was beyond him.

Roger grabbed an IRT express downtown, and sitting in the clattering hell of the subway car he tried to ignore the overhead fluorescents that babbled I'M TRYING TO SAVE YOUR SOUL, YOU CLOWN. I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU. ARE YOU BEING ASSAULTED BY LOVE EVERY DAY SO MUCH YOU CAN TURN DOWN A TERRIFIC OFFER LIKE THIS?

Roger closed his eyes. It didn't help. His chest coil was obviously activated and it was pulsing in time with the overheads. He opened his eyes and with a sudden weariness that swept over him like a sea of sand he opened his mouth and gave a primal scream. No one in the subway car noticed.

He got out on Times Square and, of course, she was everywhere. In the signs of the sea food restaurant on the other side of 42nd street, in the marquees of the skin film theaters, in the neon of the pornobook shops, in every flashing, bubbling, flickering, hallucinating light that made up the visual pollution by which Times Square proclaimed its wares and snagged

its victims.

"Okay!" he howled, standing in the middle of the sidewalk as the mobs split around him. "Okay! I quit! I've had enough! I give up! Name it, just name it, I'll do it! I've had the course! I'm only human and I've had it!"

TERRIFIC! AT LONG LAST! said the neon come-ons. **THERE'S A LADDER OVER THERE BY THAT MOVIE, SEE IT?**

Roger looked and, yes, there was a twenty-foot ladder up under the marquee of a movie house playing a double bill comprised of **LEATHER LOVERS** and **REBECCA OF SINNYBROOK FARM**. "Now what?" Roger said, softly.

I CAN'T HEAR YOU the neon replied.

"I said: what the hell now you goddam pain in the ass!" he screamed, at the highest decibel count he had ever achieved, his throat going raw. People shied away.

CLIMB UP THE LADDER, YOU SWEET THING.

"Oh, God," Roger mumbled, "this is just terrible; just terrible. I hate this a lot."

But he climbed the ladder, just as the assistant manager of the theater—a zit-laden young man in a soiled tuxedo and argyle socks—emerged from the lobby carrying the heavy boxes of marquee letters to change the bill. "Hey! Hey, you! Weirdo, what the

gahdam flop hell you think you're doin'? Get offa there you freako-devo-pervert!"

ON ANOTHER PLANE OF EXISTENCE, where things were vastly different from those in the world that had given Roger Charna his neon chest spiral, observations were made and the new color was seen.

"There it is," they said.

"Yep, there it is," they said.

"Took them long enough," they said.

"Well, now that they're ready we can go and show them how to do it," they said.

"They're going to like this," they said.

"A lot," they said.

And they set out immediately, and it took no time at all to get there, and when they arrived they changed everything and everyone enjoyed it a lot.

And everyone said the angels were the exact color of charna, which wasn't a bad name for it at all.

Roger went up and up, and when he was standing at the top he was on a level with the neon theater name. It said, very suddenly, **TAKE ME! TAKE ME NOW!**

AND FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON Roger could name, he reached out with both hands, swung himself onto the marquee, and—ripping open his shirt so his

coil was exposed—he slammed himself against the love-message.

There was a blinding flash of light that pulsed and continued flashing like endless novae, over and over and over resembling—said a narcotics squad cop who had worked on the ski patrol at Stowe, Vermont—who happened to be emerging from the theater handcuffed to two Queens junkies he'd caught scoring in the highest row of the balcony—resembling nothing so much as the sunlight glassflashing off the thin crust of ice over powder at the summit of a snow-covered mountain.

Someone else said it was the exact color of tuna fish salad.

But when the light faded, Roger Charna was gone, all save the little finger of his left hand, lying on the sidewalk humming a medley of tunes from *The Student Prince*, *Blossom Time* and *The Desert Song*, a very peculiar eyeball that seemed to have developed a terrible case of glaucoma, and a dollar and thirty-five cents in change.

Someone else said it was the

exact color of the cardboard they used to reinforce his shirts when they came from the Chinese hand laundry.

And one thing more.

Every neon sign in Times Square had a new color added to its spectrum. It seemed to reside somewhere between silver and orange, bled off into the ultraviolet and the infrared at one and the same time, had tinges of vermilion at the top and jade at the bottom, and resembled no other color ever seen by human eyes. The color sounded like a Louisville slugger connecting solidly with a hardball in that special certain way that produces a line drive high into the right center bleachers. It smelled like a forest of silver pines just after the rain, with scents of camomile, juniper, melissa and mountain gentian thrown in. It felt like the flesh of a three-week-old baby's instep. It tasted like lithograph ink, but there are people who like the taste of lithograph ink.

Someone said it was the exact color of caring.

□



LOUP GAROU

a. a. ATTANASIO

He prayed for his dead mother's bones . . . but when the werewolf came, would he fight for them, as well?



A LOUD, MOURNFUL CRY rang through the blue mist of the evening cooking fires. The constant rhythm of drums ceased, and the forest grew unnaturally calm. Robo came through the jasmine hedges and sat himself beside his brother on the white sand between the water and the forest.

"They are taking her away now," Robo told him.

"She is already gone. They can take her nowhere," Nappy Head said.

"But shouldn't we go?" Robo asked.

"Why?"

"She was our mother."

"So?" Nappy asked. "She was a *mambo*, a priestess. Let the other witches tend to her. We share her blood. They share her spirit."

"She never wanted it that way," Robo said to him, "only we never had the spirit."

Nappy Head looked at his brother who was a tall, very well built young man, not yet married, not yet head of a house. He was a simple man with hair cropped like a warrior, a flat, plain face and a white cotton shirt and canvas trousers. There was nothing pretentious, nothing mysterious about him.

"No, we never had the spirit," Nappy Head agreed. He gazed out over the waters to the far away tops of trees that stood outlined on the edge of the sky.

Nappy Head was much different

than his brother, in many ways. His cheeks were sunk slightly, his lips were rather thin, and on the young face there was the same ominous and fixed expression—the same absorbed, contemplative expression that his mother had worn. Neither was he a simple man. He had gone often to Port-au-Prince and one time had worked there for several months. He was wise in the ways of white men and had acquired much of their manner. He wore denims, dark glasses and a derby hat that he had won off a sailor in a game of craps. In the village he was not much respected except by the younger boys who were friends of his son Joyaya. They liked him because he brought them cigarettes and stories from the city.

"I was with her for five nights," Robo said in a deliberate tone. "She heard voices calling her from the water, and she fought me to go. When she saw I would not let her, she wailed for a long time because I did not understand her. Then she made me promise that when she had gone we would not destroy or give away her bones."

Nappy Head gave him a side-long glance. "Why her bones?"

"She was a *mambo*," Robo said as if this were an answer.

"So? Are her bones different? Are they miraculous? Was *ma mere* a saint?" he asked, restraining a sarcastic chuckle.

It grieved Robo to hear his brother speak this way. He ran a

hand over his face and turned his eyes out over the waters.

They sat for a long time together in the growing darkness, staring out to the black stillness of the forest, and remembered their mother each in their own way. Her name had been Syreeta, and she had been born in Africa. When she was brought as a child to Haiti with several hundred other slaves, she ran away to the hills. For half her life she lived in a cave with a *houngan*, a priest who apprenticed her to his magic. He steeped her in the arterial river of her ancestral blood and gave her the knowledge of her racial history, the entire collective over time. He taught her the methods of the *loa*, the Invisibles and how to master them so that she would have power within her environment. From these she learned of possession and how to succumb to trance and assume the identities of the *loa*. She became strong at this and practiced it frequently in the different villages to cure illness and protect crops. Her reputation as a Voudoun priestess spread until she was recognized over the entire island. But her children realized little of this, catching only the proverbial wisdoms of the sharp, crafty angers of her *mambo* experience.

"So," said Nappy Head, "tell me about her bones."

"My sorrow, my burnt-up heart does not let me speak," Robo said.

"We are sons of the same

mother," Nappy Head pleaded in the local dialect that he knew would move his brother.

Robo looked at him with his flat, adolescent face, and the other smiled serenely at him. He had a pleasant smile if you did not heed the gold chain and animal tooth that dangled from his left ear; it added the lie to all his sincerity, it was the mark of an evil hold.

"Maybe you should listen about her bones," Robo said.

"Then tell me."

"I feel it means nothing to you, but she would be disgraced if her bones left our family."

"Why? She is dead."

"She was a *mambo*," Robo told him. "Her bones are valuable to those who know how to use them."

"So why not let them have them—for the right price?"

Robo shook his head. He did not understand his brother. They had been born under the same roof. Why was he so blind to respect? "She was our mother. You do not sell the bones of your mother. We will . . . I will protect them with my life."

What a fool, Nappy Head thought. "Who would steal them?"

"There is one."

"Who?"

"A *houngan* on a small island not far from here," Robo answered.

"How do you know this?"

"She told me. She said he would come and that he would persist until he got them—or we killed

him."

"That is nonsense, Robo."

"I believe it."

"Then you are a fool."

Robo lowered his head and rose suddenly. The other, sitting still, waited a moment and then asked, "What is his name?"

There was a pause, then he heard, "Baah."

HOUGAN BAAH carried no weapon with him, ever. But he never knew fear. If he were attacked right in front of you, you could see him meet the attack with his eyes, and, if you were good, you could see the subtle shift of his weight as he readied himself. Then he would spin smoothly in one liquid movement and leave his attacker alone. When he moved in to kill, it was all done in the same rush. The other looking at him straight in the eyes, overcome. He drew up his hands like ready claws and sighted with the same movement. He cried out once and drew himself close to the other just for a moment. When he spun away, the other collapsed coughing blood, looking straight at Houngan Baah with wide, empty eyes. -

Both Robo and Nappy Head heard these things about him, so when he finally came to their mother's hut where Robo lived, they treated him with much respect.

He came to buy their mother's bones and made no secret about his

own magical dealings. He offered them thirty gold pieces, which was a sum considerable enough to tempt Nappy. But Robo refused to sell the bones and sent Houngan Baah away, despite his brother's looks of annoyance.

Half an hour later, Denis Legba, the headman of the tribe, came to the hut. His eyes were wide and staring, and he looked very frightened. Robo tried to calm with open, happy gestures of welcome. Nappy Head saw immediately that it was useless. He sat himself in a corner, lit a cigarette and pulled his derby down to the top of his dark glasses.

"I must speak to you now," the headman said. "Speak before day and peace are gone and the night of fear is upon our people."

Robo begged him with his hands to speak.

Denis Legba folded his wide-brim hat in his hand, sighed with an almost imperceptible pause, and then let his words flow on, without a breath, without any expression but his open-eyes stare.

"Houngan Baah promises us all a time of trouble and death unless you sell him Syreeta's bones. You are both strong young men, fit to live great lives as land holders and men of honor, but neither of you has the spirit for Voudoun. This is a time of peace. A time of fishing and good crops. There is no reason for foolish squabbles over something neither of you have spirit for. There

is no reason to empty the full bellies of our people and take out the rusty weapons to defend bones that are worthless to you. Give Houngan Baah Syreeta's bones."

Robo shook his head slowly and exclaimed in an intense whisper, "O Discord! O Evil!"

"Give him the bones, Robo," Denis Legba begged.

"I could not live if I did such a thing. Understand me, Hotu Legba."

The headman snarled and looked to the corner where Nappy Head was sitting, looking on with supreme disinterest. "Nappy, you are the elder. Tell your stubborn brother to give Houngan Baah the bones."

Nappy Head removed the cigarette from his lips and blew the thick smoke out thoughtfully.

"I respect my brother," he told Denis Legba. "We are two who are like one. I have no interest in the bones, I tell you up front. But Robo does, so I must take an interest. Tell Houngan Baah to go away. We do not want to bother with him."

Denis Legba accepted this rejection with much visible pain and left the hut moaning. He told Baah, and after the *houngan* listened, he went off immediately.

THE TERROR DID NOT BEGIN for several days. It started with the disappearance of several children. The bodies were eventually found, torn as if by a wild

animal. The rumors of a *loup garou* spread quickly. All the families took the precautions necessary against the man-beast, but, nonetheless, several more children vanished.

Denis Legba said that one of the brothers, since they insisted on keeping the bones, should use them to do a *loa* ceremony so that they could drive off the creature. But Robo did not know how, and though Nappy Head did, he refused to, fearing the ceremony more than the monster.

Later, a number of the villagers beseeched Robo for the bones, and he refused them, after which the werewolf came in closer to the huts. And one night Nappy Head was awakened by the beast roaring somewhere up along the river. It was a deep sound with an hysterical quality to it that made it seem much closer than it actually was, and when he awoke in the night to hear it, he was afraid. His wife was not in the cot beside him. There was no one to still his fear. He sat up and searched the darkness for her.

She was gone.

He rose and stepped out of the hut. In the moonlight he could see the many prints of the *loup garou*. His fear mounted when he realized that the monster had been—just outside his door. He ran frantically to the side of the hut. There he found his wife coming quickly from the back, her face wild with terror. He took her in his arms and shook

her to awareness.

"Joyaya," she mumbled.
"Joyaya."

At the sound of his son's name, Nappy Head ran to the back where the boy's room was. It was empty, the *loup garou's* prints clustered around it.

Nappy Head went to his brother at once and told him what had happened. Robo shook with grief and cried out loud. This only annoyed Nappy Head, and he took Robo's gun and machete and went for the motorboat he owned.

Robo followed after him, and the two set off up the river. They travelled silently for several hours to Houngan Baah's island. By the time they arrived the moon had set and the darkness seemed impenetrable.

They waited in the marsh for two hours while it grew lighter, fearing to advance over unknown terrain. They did not speak the whole time. Nappy Head could only think of his son, hoping he were alive, kept as hostage for the bones. He felt wrath hot in his stomach and chest. Robo was afraid. He had not thought how his brother felt as they moved out of the marsh at first light. He only knew the fear in his throat, stiffening his legs, making it difficult for him to keep up with Nappy Head.

They made their way to a low-lying hut that was in the middle of a large field of marshgrass. It would have been imperceptible from the

beach were there not traces of smoke from the cooking fire. Robo could go no farther when he saw it, and he waited while his brother ran right up to the place and threw himself in. Several moments later he emerged carrying Joyaya in his arms and screaming for Robo to run for the boat.

Robo waited long enough to see Houngan Baah, or what resembled him, stumble out of the hut. The *houngan* was stooped over in a peculiar fashion and was actually hopping after them instead of running.

Robo ran toward the water. Several quick glances over his shoulder showed that the *houngan* was pursuing, stooping closer and closer to the ground, sweeping his face along it, almost invisible in the rowdy grass. Then a loud roar rumbled past them, and Robo turned to see the tops of the rusted grass moving as the *loup garou* bounded toward them. Robo felt his heart become weak, and he ran up close to Nappy Head.

"Take your child to the boat," he told his brother. "I shall hold it back, for I have the rifle and I am a good shot. Run swiftly. When I have emptied the rifle, I will follow. I am quick, and we will be gone before the animal comes on us. I will hold it here. Run swiftly."

He dropped to his knee and fired two shots but nothing happened. Then he remembered that he had the safety on, and as he lowered the

rifle to move the safety, he heard the *loup garou* cry again. His palms sweated profusely, and as he fired, he heard the whump that meant the bullet had struck; but the beast kept on coming. He shot several more times but every bullet ripped the earth around the slinking figure. He had only two bullets left, and he released them in rapid succession. He heard them both hit, but they only slowed the animal. Seeing this, he got up and ran for the boat.

Nappy Head was already on board and had started the engine. He watched his brother run across the marsh. The deadly wake of the *loup garou* was closing in on him with long, hurried bounds. Robo struggled a little farther and then fell. He was up again immediately and running, but the *loup garou* was crying defiantly as it closed in. Robo shouted, "Hold the boat!" The beast was on his heels. Nappy Head looked at his son withered with fear in the front of the boat. When he looked back his brother was gone, and there was only confusion in the high grass.

Nappy Head swung the boat out into the bay. The sound of the engine picked up, but he could hear his brother crying above it. He heard his name several times, and he heard the savage voice of the beast. He did not look back but steered the boat toward the mouth of the bay. His name came out to him one more time, and then there

was only the sound of the engine.

WHEN NAPPY HEAD returned to the village, he told Denis Legba what had happened. That night they had a ceremony for Robo's spirit, but Nappy Head did not attend. He spent that night and the three days that followed it preparing himself to do a *loa* ceremony. He had watched his mother many times, and he knew exactly what he had to do. Several of the older women agreed to help him, and they persuaded the rest of the village to participate.

Nappy Head was not sure that he could go into trance and assume the identity of an Invisible. He had seen his mother do it, he believed now that it could be done because he wanted to do it. Maybe because he had seen the *loup garou*.

Before, he had always feared the ceremony because he had seen the pain and the incredible fear that it had caused his mother. He had grown up seeing the agony of this work, and he despised it. But even so, he chose to do it now. It was for his son's sake. He had to prove that he had left Robo to die not out of cowardice but for Joyaya. He prepared by fasting and rehearsal to assume the identity of *Ghede*, the death *loa*, the strongest of the Invisibles, and the one to be the most feared.

As the son of a *mambo*, Nappy Head had a chance of success. The ability to be mounted by a *loa* is

passed down through the blood. *Ghede* had used his mother. Nappy knew its attributes well from his exposure to those early experiences. The *loa* of death makes great demands on its chosen, and to submit once is the same as giving your entire identity, the whole of your life to *Ghede*. You can exist for no one else afterward. But Nappy Head's sorrow was so great that even these things made no difference to him. Under the guidance of the old women who had known his mother, he prepared to cut away his entire self.

The courtyard of the village was ready on the evening designated. The whole tribe turned out, and those that had agreed to participate were dressed in their finest clothes: bright scarves and colored dresses. As Nappy Head entered the roofed, open-sided area where the ceremony would be performed, a quiet came over the crowd until there were only whispered voices remaining.

Suddenly, like a sharp knife plunging into the soft heat and the soft chatter, Nappy Head voiced the initial salutations. The drums flung the extended snare of their rhythm into the night. The people drew in closer, and the high clang of the iron *ogan* set in, its wind-filled resonance abruptly casting open all the upper regions of sound.

Nappy Head opened a canvas bag to reveal the long, black sticks that were his mother's bones. He

picked the two largest ones up and in his mother's name invoked *Ghede*.

The chorus of voices hurled forward from the crowd and rose with the drums and the *ogan*. Everyone was standing upright, singing, some screaming the song, some laughing, some solemn, all clapping their hands.

The dancing began. The bodies of the dancers undulated, the hands and arms moving separately from the head, shoulders, and legs. The eyes were fixed on the ground, and the bodies, which began in postures almost erect, bent to the ground and swept in slow flowing circles.

Nappy Head joined them, rising, stepping forward, becoming part of the movement, flowing with it, its motion becoming his. They danced for a long time.

Presently, the drums ceased. Nappy Head, perspiring profusely, scanned the line of crowding people, the many lively faces planed down into masks of anonymity. He took two steps forward, and his left leg suddenly rooted, numbly, to the ground, pitching him forward. Someone's hand grasped his arm, supported him firmly. There was an unpleasant lightness in his head, as if the many parts of the brain were being gently disengaged, its solidity, its integrity being somehow imperceptibly dispersed. There were growing spaces of emptiness in his head.

The leg momentarily caught, the

strange, subtle thinning out of consciousness: these are the warning signs of possession. As the drums started up again and the dancing and clapping resumed, Nappy Head felt as if he was entering a dream and saw that the others were removed to a distance. As he was slipping out of awareness, his fear grew.

The drum rhythm increased to a frenzy, and at that very moment, a man standing on the periphery of the court keeled over backward. A loud, hysterical scream reached across the crowd. The *loup garou* was among the people!

NAPPY HEAD SPOTTED IT but ignored the terror that shafted through him. Rooted upon one leg, he felt a cold numbness enter it from the earth itself and mount, within the very marrow of the bone, as slowly and thickly as sap mounts the trunk of a tree. His sense of self doubled, and it was as if he were watching himself stuck to the earth. His vision of himself flickered, the lids fluttered, the gaps between moments of sight grew greater, wider. He was becoming two. He saw his dancing self here, and next in a different place, facing another direction. He was lost in dead space and dead time. He wrenched at himself, and the effort catapulted him across a vast, vast distance into voices—great, insistent, singing voices. He was sucked down and exploded

upward at once.

Ghede turned. It was no longer Nappy Head. The posture, the tilt of the head, the voice—all different.

The people had scattered from the *loup garou*, and now it faced *Ghede* who was singing fervently, arrogantly, laughing out loud.

The creature slowly circled *Ghede*, drawing in closer. Then, still singing, still laughing, *Ghede* reached down between his legs and brought forth, in his clenched hand, a gleam of metal. And though it would seem impossible that this should be so, since Nappy had taken nothing but the bones with him, it was a long knife that *Ghede* held.

The *loup garou* held itself in near catatonic immobility, realizing now that it was not Nappy Head it confronted. It visibly hesitated between continuing with its purpose and retreating.

Ghede held the blade far from his body. He danced in the wavering torchlight, back and forth, quartering the courtyard, pushing the *loup garou* ahead of him. It was reluctant to retreat, desperately trying to outflank *Ghede* and reach the altar. Now that Nappy Head had actually used the bones, this would be the last chance to take them.

Observing the beast's motive, *Ghede* lowered his knife-hand, quartered to the left, circled back around the altar, leaving it wide

open.

A cluster of the braver tribesmen who were watching the confrontation from the raised ledge of the water ditch called out to *Ghede* to warn him of his oversight: the bones on the altar were only a bound away from the creature.

The *loup garou* edged closer to the altar. Its eyes were wide and staring—great black holes—studying *Ghede* with an apparent wariness in the dull torchlight.

Ghede pressed the confrontation now, taking another step backwards, away from the altar. The small crowd on the ledge began to mutter.

There was a long moment of tension, the beast watching both the altar and *Ghede* with jaws slack, a careful uncertainty in the flow of muscles—then it pounced! There was a shadow-hidden movement, and it was on the altar, on top of the bones.

A loud gasp came from the ledge.

Ghede had seen the leap coming: the animal's eyes had given him the hint, and, in a blurred motion, he leaped sideways to meet it, his knifehand shooting out and down, catching the skin of the creature. The *loup garou* howled and twisted with pain and surprise against the knife's edge, but *Ghede's* hand had caught it by the neck and held it fast. With a violent turn and thrust, he slammed the metal deep into the muscles. He felt the whole body of

it shudder as one of its lungs collapsed and the animal wrenched itself from his grip.

It limped quickly toward the forest, and for a moment it was a shadow on the village edge. Then it was gone.

Ghede turned to face the crowd that was gradually moving from the darkness. He held his hands above his grinning head. There was no knife.

A gathering cry of joy worked through the people as they began to rush forward, filling the courtyard. But in their midst, *Ghede* stiffened as though he had been struck and fell like a limp rag, face down.

A VIOLENT CALAMITY of color spilled over the sky as the sun rose through the trees. Nappy Head shivered awake. Whirling silence settled around him. Every fiber in his body accepted the fact that something profound had happened to it.

A cold, dry hand touched his face, and he focused his eyes despite the sharp pain of seeing. A knobby, gray-haired woman, one of the elders, offered him drink. He took it reluctantly and sat up.

"Where am I?" he asked.

The old woman removed the metal cup. Its shiny surface caught the slatted light from the cracks in the wall and sent glittering shards of reflection shooting around the room.

Nappy Head felt suddenly dizzy, ears roaring. "You are in Denis Legba's home, Hougan," the woman told him.

The words reached to him across a great distance, and that last word—*hougan*—echoed interminably in his mind.

He struggled to sit up, fought away nausea. Ignoring the old woman's advice, he stood up and walked to the door.

The door opened on the courtyard, and he advanced slowly into the blinding light. Several dark figures gathered around him and offered their aid, reverently calling him "*hougan*." The strangeness of the phrase numbed him, and he waved them aside.

His eyes were gradually adjusting to the light, and in the center of the courtyard he could discern a bulky figure hanging from a tall pole.

Nappy Head felt a growing alienation as he advanced into the center of the circle. It was as though he had lost a fragment of himself and sought it here. He touched the pole and looked up at the dangling form. It was a large, canine creature with staring, empty eyes.

He turned his head away with the stark understanding that there would be no further trouble from

Hougan Baah. Robo was avenged. The village had regained its tranquility.

But him? What of him? He had sacrificed his freedom of will for the peace of his people—but to *what* had he dedicated himself? He could remember nothing of his possession. That emptiness in his memory touched his spine with a wash of coldness. And the next time? When would be the next time that *Ghede* would see fit to use him? Nappy Head knew that he would be powerless to stop *Ghede* now—he was bound by laws of servitude he barely recognized let alone understood. And worse, there was nothing to do but live out his life—no, this life. He felt a silent wail begin somewhere in his mind.

A loud, raucous cry drew him out of himself, and he turned to face a knot of children. Among the grinning faces, he spied his son working his way toward him. "Tell us a story, Nappy Head," one of them asked, and the others agreed enthusiastically, slapping their thighs in crude imitation of him.

Nappy Head laughed and threw both hands up over his head. "Tell us a story, tell us a story," he mimed. "That's all you want of me." And lifting his son to his shoulders, he walked among the children to the river. □



If you enjoyed THE HAUNT OF HORROR, you may find food for thought in Marvel's new GIANT-SIZE COMICS—featuring fear-fraught tales of terror and suspense!

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"In The Wind . . ."

Next issue's feature story is "Kilbride," on excursion into the twisted world of Hollywood with author Ron Goulart. Those of you who followed Ron's *Mox Kearny, Ghost Breaker* series of a few years ago are already aware of Mr. Goulart's specialized way of dealing with the supernatural; those of you unfamiliar with Ron's work will find yourselves pleasantly surprised. Who is Kilbride? You could call him a Muse . . . but that hardly account for the smoke, and the ever-present stench of Brimstone . . .

Also featured in our August issue is the first of a series of articles by supernatural-savant Lin Carter, a piece titled "Digging Up Atlantis." For the past few years, Lin has been carving quite a reputation for himself in the horror-genre as editor and author; Ballantine Books recently published his monumental study of one of the field's most renowned authors, a work called *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos,"* and has also brought out several of his popular anthologies of horror stories, among them, *Dragons, Elves, and Heroes*, and *New Worlds for Old*. Lin is also the creator of the popular *Thongor* series of sword-and-sorcery, which is currently being adopted by the Marvel Comics Group.

Anne McCaffrey visits our second issue with "Finders Keepers," a story about a young boy with a peculiar power to "find" lost things . . . and what happens to him when an insurance investigator discovers the boy's power and decides to put it to good use.

John K. Diomedé returns with the second story in his *Dr. Worm* series, titled, appropriately enough, "The Second Step." As those of you who read this issue's lead novelette have no doubt guessed, we're due to see a great deal more of the good doctor and his villainous brother, Confield. In his new story, Diomedé explores the relationship between perceived and hidden evil . . . and the effect of both upon our lives! □



A BIT OF QUIET HORROR FROM THE
AUTHOR OF "MODERAN" . . .

SEEING STINGY ED

DAVID R. BUNCH

I SAW HIM where he sat in an old and musty feed store in a small town, and it wasn't Stingy Ed. It was Ed's help. Ed's help, new to me, was seated flat on the floor in front of a huge mound of snarled-up cord, and he was tying bits of that together. I thought it rather strange that a passably bright and capable-looking young man of twenty-some should be wasting his time thus. I saw many unused balls of the kind of twine he was tying, but I asked anyway, "String shortage, huh?"

"No." That was all he said. But the way he said it! It sounded like the wind blowing through a moon-cut on somebody's old souvenir outhouse, maybe. Or maybe it sounded like spooks you've heard on Halloween. Anyway, it sounded all-gone. It sounded like he meant N-O.

"Well then, what the hell then?" I asked.

"No. There's no shortage." He glanced up briefly. "How many you want?" And he looked as

though he hoped he wouldn't have to get up off the floor to sell me any balls of twine. He scowled in concentration as he bent again to his string tying, his no-sleeves summer shirt revealing the fine play of muscles in his big pale upper arms and his forearms working. A shag mop of sweaty, snarled, hay-color hair fell down across his wan, drained forehead and into his vacant-stare eyes. —He'd been in the shade of that feed store too many days, or something was wrong, I thought.

"I don't want to buy any twine," I said. "I sell twine. I came in to see Ed."

"Oh." He put the unruly hair toward where it belonged, looked up, and he seemed rested. Then he did a quick face-change, and he seemed suddenly shaken and tired. "Ed? You came in to see Ed?"

"Yes," I said.

"Ed's not here."

"Oh?"

"No, Ed's gone." He went on tying string.

"Where's Ed gone?"

"Ed's just gone." And he looked at me. His watery blue eyes tried to hold on mine. "You know," he said, "if I's you, I wouldn't expect to see Ed. Not right now. Later today, maybe. —Go on down to the next town and come back. Maybe it won't seem so important. Then."

"No?"

"No." He continued to pick small tangled bits of twine out of the huge pile and unsnarl them and tie them into one long thread. Then he would wind that thread into a huge, lumpy ball he was making.

"Sure," I agreed, "I'll go on down to the next town. Why not? I have a call to make down there. But before I go, tell me what that bumping, thumping noise is I hear. Seems to come from a closet or something."

"Rat." He said it without looking up. "Big rat.—We've got them, lots of them. All feed stores have lots of rats, one way and another."

"Sure, they go together. Like knots and twine. Heh, heh, heh." Then I went on down to the next town.

WHEN I GOT BACK TO TARKIO, the first town, and the feed store, I expected to find the bleary-eyed young man sitting beside a truly huge ball of twine. But he wasn't. He was depleting what he had and working it into a twine rope. I knew the feed store had all kinds of rope, but I asked

anyway, "How about placing a good order with me for some big footage of new rope, hey?"

"No." Winter words through bare trees have sounded more full of life, I think.

"Well," I breezed, "Ed's back, hey?"

"No." When he looked up, I saw that his eyes had watered more, and he seemed truly sad, somehow. Why, if I'd thought he could possibly have had any reason for it, I'd have been sure he was crying. "Call on the store on the other side of town," he suggested. "Stay long enough and Ed'll be here. For sure. This time."

"Sure thing," I nodded, "I'll do it. Maybe they'll place an order for something. Also, I'll have a snack at Nell's restaurant or the old Noodle Poodle Cafe. That'll give Ed plenty of time, won't it?"

"Sure. Go slow enough."

So I called on the store on the other side of town. It was a feed store and sort of a general store. They placed a few orders for odds and ends. I snacked at Nell's. Then I came on back to see how the rope was doing, and to see Ed.

The young man was not seated by his twine ball now, making a rope. He was lounging against a stack of mill-run feed in sacks, just staring away, across at—well, at nothing, I should guess. "Ed back?" I called.

"Yeah."

"Well, can I see him?" In truth I

was getting just a little bit impatient with this laconic, terse-lipped, funny-eyed young man.

"Yeah, come on." So he led me past stacks of mill-run, shorts, and bran in colored sacks, as well as past grown corn, ear corn, shelled corn and Kaffir corn in burlap bags. He led me back to a gloomy place where the rafters were more cobwebbed, and where everything seemed darker and dustier than it ever should have seemed, even in a feed store.

"There's Ed!"

And he was right! Ed was just above us! His stringy form seemed to dangle more or less jauntily, suspended as it was from one of the more cobwebbed of the rafters. A knotty, lumpy rope was around his skinny Adam's-apple neck. His eyes were a little too far out from his angular, old-goat face for him to be seeing anything, and his general deportment was of the hanged. Homemade. Not having his neck snapped properly, professionally, it

is certain that while he strangled he struggled But the only question I could think to ask at the time was, "Well—well, why in thunder did you go to all the trouble to make that rope!"

The laconic, watery-eyed one seemed to think it a natural enough question. "He was nuts about economy. That's why we saved that twine."

"But why—why in the world did you do it?" I was finally getting to more pertinent, meaningful asking.

The terse one yawned. "Too economical. For a bachelor. Always one for making things serve double duty." He leaned against the mound of saved dailies, folded his pale bulgy arms and seemed to enjoy seeing Stingy Ed up there. After awhile he unfolded his pale bulgy arms, clawed distractedly in the sweat of his hay-color hair for a time, stifled half another yawn and soon with swift kicks shattered all the sacks of used light bulbs. "Even my little wife . . ." □



NON-FICTION DEPARTMENT:

Each issue in this section we plan to run an article of interest to the serious student of the macabre. This time around our offering examines the nature of fictional horror today, in a piece entitled . . .

THE LURKER IN THE FAMILY ROOM

THOUGHTS ON FOUR
MODERN HORROR NOVELS

BY DENNIS O'NEIL

1
". . . many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions . . ."

—Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

Once upon a time, it wasn't easy to become the victim of a Ghastly Unspeakable; a person had to travel, and through some pretty unwholesome geography, too. Witness this typical opening paragraph from H.P. Lovecraft's "The Nameless City":

When I drew nigh the nameless city I knew I was accursed. I was traveling in a parched and terrible valley under the moon, and afar I saw it protruding uncannily above the sands as parts of a corpse may protrude from an ill-made grave. Fear spoke from the age-worn stones of this hoary survivor of the deluge, this great grandmother of the eldest pyramid; and a viewless aura repelled me and bade me retreat from the sinister secrets that no man should see, and no man else had dared to see.

That was the way of it. A fellow hankering to meet ghouls, fen-fiends, vampires or the odd ogre was usually required to visit foreign lands in exotic climes. Robert Walton found Herr Frankenstein on an arctic ice floe. Jonathan Harker encountered Count Dracula in Transylvania, which is in Rumania, a far distance from his native London. Even if he was lucky enough to locate a domestic horror, the adventurer still had to cross bleak countryside in wretched weather. A narrator of Poe's tells us:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively in the heavens, I had

been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country . . .

One simply did not run into Doc Frankenstein or Rodrick Usher at the corner pub.

The reason is that art—particularly genre art—is always at least partially a reflection of its era, and when what we think of as the “classic horror tales” were written, people trusted Man and his Works. Mankind was busy following the Biblical admonishment to subdue nature, and believing in the implied assumption that nature is the enemy. Therefore, logically, the opposite of the wild and untamed was where virtue lived: in short, the cities. A distrust of anything not manufactured can also be found in writings by the rationalist, realistic contemporaries of Poe, Lovecraft, Stoker, et al. For example, the supreme fictional realist, Mister Sherlock Holmes, ruminates during a train ride:

“... it is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside . . .”

Arthur Conan Doyle’s macabre colleagues used creatures born of old folk tales—supernatural beings, slightly modernized—to present their own “dreadful record of sin,” and invariably placed them in extra-urban settings. (I should add that this literary trait was not unique to the century we’re discussing here, the Nineteenth. Remember Macbeth? His initial impulse to murder occurred after meeting the witches on a heath, presumably miles from any village. Shakespeare wrote the play in 1605. A thorough researcher might prove that the tendency to identify evil with nature

paralleled the rise of technological civilization. Maybe a thorough researcher already has; a lot of theses are written these days . . .)

The tradition survives—but only infrequently on the printed page. You anachronisms reading this—print freaks, you are sometimes called—don’t see many descriptions like those I quoted in fiction copyrighted recently. Oh, sure, any horror buff can enjoy his rain-swept moors, winding lanes flanked with skeletal trees, creaking mansions and crumbling castles. (“I swear to you, Winston, I saw a light in the tower!”) Where? At the movies, of course.

(A Grumbler in the Gallery sneers, “What about Richard Matheson’s *Hell House*? And Shirley Jackson’s *Haunting of Hill House*? Those are books.” Eyes flashing, the Lecturer-savant snaps, “Matheson seemed to be doing a pastiche—look it up, oaf—and Jackson is the well-known exception. There are doubtless others. Bad cess to you, Grumbler.”)

And what masquerades for artistic intention in films is frequently happenstance or necessity. Arguably, these movies are shot in eerie locations because A) *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and their countless successors were adapted from novels published a half-century-plus earlier, and, consequently, used locales similar to those described by the authors; and B) those entertainments were completed while the tradition was alive, though moribund, in the print media; and C) they earned fortunes, thus causing gentlemen with fat cigars and fatter wallets to encourage similar projects; and D) —

(The Grumbler again: “I saw a swell limey flick last night—*The Beast In The Cellar*. Had everything—a moor, an old house, torn blouses, blood, gore . . . And explain the Hammer flicks—they’re

modern. And that groovy *Night of the Living Dead* and” Wearily, the lecturer-savant interrupts: “I am coming to those. Quiet yourself, Grumbler, or I shall be forced to banish you from this essay.”)

—As I was saying, the final reason for using remote locales in horror movies is economic. Like science fiction and pornography, the supernatural has had, since the 1930’s, a limited but intensely faithful audience. Small producers with the right distribution system can, within limits, predict their boxoffice. Consequently, they can be certain of a profit provided their horror (and science fiction and porn) can be done on a modest budget. It is difficult and expensive to film in cities; it is easy and cheap to film in the farmlands. Scripts are written accordingly. Simple.

II

“I know you’re going to love it here and I want to wish you a sincere and hearty ‘Welcome to Stepford.’”

—Ira Levin: *The Stepford Wives*

These days, would-be victims of a Ghostly Unnamable can stay within walking distance of their living rooms, or closer. Rosemary Woodhouse gave birth to her demonic baby in the next apartment and little Regan MacNeil challenged *The Exorcist* without leaving her cozy bed. Niles and Holland, the haunted twins in *The Other*, inhabit a territory straight from a Norman Rockwell painting, with clanging trolley cars, bucolic barns and lovable eccentrics. Joanna Eberhart, one of *The Stepford Wives*, finds her porcelain’s delight of a daemon in a suburban split-level.

No sombre foreign hamlets in these chillers: no, they’re set in Manhattan, rural Minnesota (but not too rural, not with those trails), Georgetown and Stepford—for which read Levittown, White Plains, Milford, those self-consciously civilized

commuter settlements bright young marrieds escape to from New York City.

The four books are, by any reasonable criteria, horror stories, and none have suffered the fate of genre fiction—being read only by that devoted cult. On the contrary: each of them is a best-seller, and three supply the plots for multi-million dollar movies. Producers of the pictures didn’t worry about the trouble and expense of filming in population centers; they’re peddling proven commodities.

Such popularity is fairly startling, considering that the *The Exorcist*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Other* are not the usual bestseller material; they are not soap opera given a cachet of respectability like *Love Story*, nor thinly fableized biographies of the rich and scandalous like *The Carpetbaggers*, nor faddish freaks like *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Certainly, the authors used a few tricks of the Harold Robbins-Jacqueline Susann crowd: The actress in William Peter Blatty’s *Exorcist* is recognizably Shirley MacLaine and Ira Levin’s Rosemary and Joanna are cousins to the tribulation-worn ladies in *The Brighter Day*. But weepy sentiment and gossipy titillation are ornaments in these works; their substance is stark horror.

So horror is in vogue, fadder far the masses. Yet it’s not the kind of horror fraught with vampires and ghosts, nor are there any mad scientists in the novels we’re considering. Rosemary’s tormentors are a physician, a psychiatrist and a charmingly doffy old couple. Joanna Eberhart is menaced by the businessman members of a local men’s club, including her husband. The fiend in *The Other* is a sweet-tempered thirteen-year-old boy. And there are no villains in *The Exorcist*, unless you count Satan, and he appears in the guise of a precocious child.

Children are, in fact, central elements in

three of the four novels, and in the fourth, the heroine's pregnant friend provides a sub-plot. However, the youngsters are not the darlings we're accustomed to in popular fiction, neither symbols of innocence nor hopes for the future. They are embodiments of inhuman bestiality. The little monsters are little monsters.

(From the accursed gallery, a familiar whine: "You're saying that's something new? Boloney. Henry James used a couple of spooky kids in his ghost story, published when daddy was a pup." Sighing, the Lecturer-savant replies, "Yes. I'm not claiming Thomas Tryon, Ira Levin and William Peter Blatty had no predecessors. Au contraire, dullard. I would guess that Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* is, quite specifically, the major influence on them.")

Another thing Tryon, Blatty and Levin attempt to do is infuse ordinary, homey objects and sites with the evil present in their nasty tykes. A tobacco tin, a shopping cart, wax crayons—these are shown to be as terrifying to the protagonists as Dracula's tomb was to Jonathan Harker. Supermarkets and phone booths are filled with the hideous promise of Poe's pit. True, they don't always scare us, because none of the books is a complete success, artistically. Blatty and Tryon occasionally overwrite, and Levin's work is marred by a simpering heroine in *Rosemary's Baby* and a ridiculous premise in *Stepford Wives*. But the intention is plain—to make everyday implements and scenes frightening.

The final element common to the nouveau-chillers is a post-Freudian mentality. The authors are loathe to state, unequivocally, that super-normal forces are responsible for the terrors their characters experience. Perhaps Joanna is merely neurotic. Perhaps Regan is merely suffering from psychotic hysteria. Tryon reverses the ploy: he explains his youthful

murderer's aberration in psychological terms, while hinting the lad may have been manipulated by a dead brother.

Considering the assumptions of Freud's theories, being victimized by a malevolent spook might be preferable to doing what the good Viennese doctor said comes naturally. Are trolls and orcs really more fearsome than the components of the human psyche, according to Freud? —the Id, roving beast lurking in the shadows, lusting to devour; the Ego, frail and self-centered creature with the morals of an office politician; and the Superego, overseer with a personality that combines traits of Torquemada and Scrooge. That's you and me, say the orthodox analysts. The newborn baby in the corner isn't a cuddlesome love bundle; she's a foulness who would gladly bite off your head, given sufficient teeth. And you're no better, and neither am I, insist the shrinks.

Trolls and Orcs would be easier to live with.

III

"... God was present in every man not only as compassion but as power, and so the country belonged to the people; for the will of the people, if the locks of their life could be given the art to turn, was then the will of God. . . . If the locks did not turn, then the will of the people was the will of the devil. —Norman Mailer:

Armies of the Night

Once upon a time, it was possible to believe in the perfectibility of man. His handiwork was seen to be progress. In the last half of the Nineteenth Century and the first decade of the Twentieth, there was a mood of optimism among the book-writers. There were electric lights, evidence that man had captured an invisible and virtually omnipotent slave and had but to educate him to further miracles. And

automobiles to free the worthy from distance, and airplanes to free them from gravity itself—indeed, the freedom of the gods from any person willing to earn it. Prophets abounded, from cultivated professors in universities to literary yahoos in the Gernsback pulps to the comfortably middle-class speculators in genteel magazines like *Colliers* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, all crying the same glad tidings: Prepare for the Millennium! The machine shall deliver you! No wonder the ambitious and adventurous herded themselves into the machine's bosoms, the cities.

(From the Gallery, a final grumble: "There are still lots of people who believe this . . . My sociology prof says—" "Silence," thunders the Lecturer-savant. "I know such folk. They tend to be footlings who can't distinguish a diode from an onopelt, and I drink no tea with them, nor shall I tolerate you. Begone.")

Then, the first big disillusionment: a bloody war to end wars that didn't, that only carved up Europe like a manic butcher. Next, a second war, far worse, from which come a doomsday explosive unleashed by a basically humane president able to ignore the warnings of 50 scientists instrumental in creating the weapon because apparently he, like many of his generation, equated big and technical with good and, brother, the A-bomb was both.

Since then, the grimness has blossomed. Freud's theories trickled into the Sunday supplements of the 50's and suddenly the public found itself bereft of the notion that humanity is noble; if men are as gods, the god is Baal, rather than just, kindly Jehovah. To confirm the sad diagnosis, elders observed the young engage in tribal rites involving heathen music, hair, sex. Senators told them society's fabric was rotten with godless communism. The air began to stink. A swim in a river was on

invitation to disease. Leaders were slaughtered and women were gutted as neighbors watched helplessly and the streets became hunting grounds for junkies with knives and—

Why go on? You print freaks read newspapers; you know the bold, brave prophecies were false. Technological civilization is, in its way, as savage as prehistoric barbarism, and possibly terminal, besides.

But the dream ended too soon. We still expect it to be there, and when we find the nightmare instead, we feel dread, and we react by searching outside the very context of the dream. "Anything that helps you make it through the night is good, whether its booze, broods or religion," remarked guru Frank Sinatra. These years, it's frequently religion, albeit in forms Saul of Tarsus would find as incomprehensible as a bolt from heaven: sacramental chemicals, arcane Oriental practices, witchcraft, quasi-Christian cultery. We search for our gods in strange places.

We search for devils, also, because if Lucifer exists, so too must his Master.

Now, recall our thises: popular art reflects its era. Horror stories are again popular. The mass purchases of such competent, but hardly excellent, books as *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Stepford Wives*, *The Other* and *The Exorcist* is evidence. But the symbols have changed; the part of us that responds to tale-telling no longer looks for the beast to emerge from the outer darkness. Our journalists, our philosophers, our salons and our own senses have convinced us that corruption is here, in the family room, in the avenues and cradles—wherever men gather. Our subconscious selves respond to tales that articulate the conviction.

Pogo, the 'Possum-savant, said it best: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." □

"CLAIRE, WHERE THE HELL is my lighter?"

"How should I know? All I have to do is keep an eye on your things, I suppose."

"Damn it, Claire. I thought you might have seen it."

"Ralph, will you hurry? We're late now. Forget the damn lighter."

"Hey, Debbie, Mommy and Daddy are going out for a while. We'll be back soon. Mrs. Lerner will be here in a minute. You be good for her or you'll be sorry."

Debbie didn't respond. She silently watched them finish dressing, greet Mrs. Lerner at the first tap on the door, and leave. She liked Mrs. Lerner. She always hoped Mommy and Daddy would get Mrs. Lerner to stay when they went out. Mrs. Lerner never forgot to feed her, and she always came when Debbie called.

After dinner, with all the things Debbie liked best, Mrs. Lerner put Debbie into her crib, with the side down because she was two and one half years old now. Giving Debbie a goodnight kiss and a "sweet dreams," she closed her door. Debbie waited a few minutes, then she slipped out of her crib. She sat behind the door, in the dark, her ear pressed close to the frame. Mrs. Lerner stayed on the telephone a lot, and Debbie liked to listen to the soft voice. Mrs. Lerner was nice.

"... I tell you Stella, it's a shame. Such a good baby. But

Here's one about a child's need for love, understanding, and...

A NICE HOME

BEVERLY GOLDBERG



those parents. They'll be home under the weather, sure as I'm Ruth Lerner. She's such a bright child... sometimes, when I watch her in the afternoon and take her to the playground, I'm amazed, I tell you. She plays with the older children... and talks... well, it's just a shame, parents like that. She could be something, but no, she'll

end up like her mother . . . married to a bum . . . drunk half the time . . . or worse"

Then Mrs. Lerner started to talk about other people and Debbie stopped listening to the words. When she heard the television click on, Debbie got back into her crib.

THE LOUD LAUGHTER woke her. She slowly climbed out of her crib and opened the door a crack. It was them . . . and tomorrow. And Debbie knew what tomorrow would be like. Nothing to eat till late. The refrigerator door was too hard to open, but she could get water from the sink in the bathroom if she climbed up very carefully. But if Mommy remembered, she'd put up the crib railing so that Debbie couldn't get out and bother her. Then she'd have to wait and wait and wait. Then Mommy would scold her because her bed was wet.

They were undressing on their way to the bedroom. They laughed and shouted to one another. Debbie played with her dolls quietly in the dark for a while.

When the noises died down, and she was sure they were asleep, she came out of her room and slowly, and quietly, began to collect their clothes. Then she went to the place where they kept all the bottles they drank from. She remembered which one Mommy had used when she made the pretty dessert. She opened the door to their room a

little bit. They had the funny dark light on and were on top of the blanket.

Debbie put the clothes she had managed to carry at the foot of the bed. Then she went out and quietly collected the rest of the clothes and brought them in, too. Then she went out and brought in the bottle. She had a lot of trouble opening it, but when she had, she carefully emptied it all over the clothes. Then she went back into her room. She got the shiny box that was called a lighter from her favorite doll's pocketbook and went back into their room.

After she set the clothes on fire, she ran out of the room and carefully turned the key in the lock. Mommy and Daddy locked Debbie out of the bedroom a lot. "She doesn't have to know everything that happens in here." Debbie had practiced locking the door one afternoon when Mommy had gone out for a long time and left her all alone. Now she waited until the door got very hot. She could hear Mommy and Daddy in there making noise. She pulled the key out and slipped it under the door. She went to the front door, but she had to get a chair to pull the chain off. She ran out into the hall screaming. She banged on the door of some nice people down the hall. It took her a very long time to explain that there was a fire because she was crying so hard.

Mrs. Carter held her while the

policemen and firemen rushed around. Debbie kept on crying. She couldn't be sure what had happened yet.

"MRS. CARTER, her folks are dead. We've called social services. But—look, in the meantime, can you help us at all? Did they drink a lot, for instance? Or . . ."

Mrs. Carter told them *all* about Mommy and Daddy.

"DEBBIE IS SOMETHING ELSE, Mr. and Mrs. Doran. Her IQ is exceptional. Of course, she's had some bad experiences, but with love and care . . ."

"Her parents?"

"Young. We don't know a great deal about them. We've been unable to trace them back very far. Drifters, you know. We're not even sure Clark was their real name. That's why the court released Deb-

bie for adoption.

"Look, spend some time with her. Get to know her. Then you can decide."

DEBBIE LIKED the new people. She'd heard enough to know that she could be their little girl if they liked her. Every time they were expected, Debbie got one of the bigger girls to tie a bow in her hair. She was always nice to them and she smiled a lot. The fifth time they came to visit, Debbie waited till they were about to leave. Then she reached up to Mrs. Doran and asked for a kiss, very softly. A *goodbye* kiss. Mrs. Doran looked at her husband, and he nodded.

Mrs. Doran said, "Debbie, would you like to be our little girl?"

Debbie hugged her, feeling happy. Maybe they would always be nice. She didn't want to have to try again. □





*Everyone's seen the
ghost . . . haven't they?*

GHOST IN THE CORN CRIB

R. A. LAFFERTY

"THE REASON OLD SHEP won't go near the corn crib is that he's the only one who ever saw the ghost there."

Old Shep was an ancient german shepherd dog who had now grown silly and forgetful with age.

"If he's the only one who ever saw it, how do you know what he saw?"

"That's the only thing he's scared of is the ghost in the corn crib, so why else won't he go near it?"

"But he's going over to lie in the shade of it right now."

"Well, that's because we're here and it's daytime. I bet you never noticed him going to the corn crib at midnight when there's nobody awake on the place."

"I've never been here at midnight, but I'll find out tonight. What does the ghost do in the corn crib?"

"It isn't really in the corn crib."

GHOST IN THE CORN CRIB

It's in the little tool room upstairs next to it. He comes there at midnight every night. My brother saw him once and died of fright."

"Which one of your brothers? They're all alive now."

"Well, it was another brother; or it was a boy anyhow once. They never did find anything left of him, and they never knew where he came from in the first place."

"Well, who saw him there if there wasn't anything left of him? Maybe he never was there at all."

"I forget that part of the story. George can tell it better than I can. But I bet you never have anything like that in town."

"No. We have a haunted house but nothing ever happens there. I don't know how they know it's haunted."

They went to get George to tell the story. They were Jimmy Latterdale the country boy, and Jimmy Johnston the town boy.

"It wasn't a boy, it was a hired man," George told them. "Papa hired him one night and gave him supper in the kitchen. Then he gave him a blanket and sent him to sleep in the room over the corn crib because he was too dirty to sleep in the house."

"They went out to get him the next morning and there wasn't a thing left of him; the ghost had got him. That was the same night Johnny the pony ran away, the old Johnny that's out in the pasture now, we don't ride him any more,

he's too old. And he was saddled and bridled too, that was the spookiest part of it. They found him three days later clear over by Downer Town. The sheriff found him. When a pony is scared by a ghost he always runs three days before he stops."

"Papa told me that when they used to have livery stables sometimes at night at the livery stable when all the horses were stalled something would get one of them and ride it all night. It'd be all lathered and hot in the morning. But nobody ever saw who got it or who brought it back."

"There was another one the ghost got. I don't know his name but he had the same name as the dirty hired man. He was a tinkerman and knife sharpener who came by one evening. He said he would work in the little tool room over the corn crib by candle light and have all the knives sharpened and the kettles mended by morning. But in the morning he was gone, and his cart and his donkey, and all the knives and pots and a lot of tools that were up there and some harness. The ghost didn't leave a thing of him. He got him right at midnight. His candle was there and blown out, and we measured it and it was burned just as far as it would be burned down by midnight. You see, a ghost comes in like the wind and blows out the light. Then he gets you in the dark. And there was another one too a long time ago."

"Wasn't there anything left of him either?"

"There sure was. There was everything left of him. He hanged himself up there."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know his name, but he had the same name as the dirty hired man and the tinker man. He was some kind of harvest hobo. They fired him over at Towners, and they fired him over at Hofmeyers, and they put the dogs on him at Schnitzgers. He was kind of drunk and nutty. When he came here we had a hired man named Smitty then, and he gave him some more red-eye and told him to go sleep in the room over the corn crib. And at midnight the ghost came with a rope and made him hang himself."

"How do you know that the ghost made him do it? Maybe he hanged himself just because he wanted to."

"Gees, his eyes were bugged out when they cut him down. He was scared to death by the ghost all right. That ghost made about a dozen more hang themselves up there too."

"That many?"

"Three or four anyway. You see, when the ghost was a man they hanged him. Somebody lied about him and got him hanged. This was a long time ago. So whatever the man's name was that lied about him, we don't know what his name was, whenever anyone of that name

is in the country, something makes him come here and go to that little room. And at midnight the ghost gets him. He has a rope and tells them they can either hang themselves or if they won't do that he'll do something a hundred times worst to them."

"Why does he just keep it up on the one name?"

"The ghost doesn't know what the man looked like that lied about him, he just knows what his last name was. They all had the same last name that something happened to. It might be any name. It might be *yours!*"

"But why is old Shep afraid of the ghost?"

"All dogs are afraid of ghosts. Once papa chained Shep up there with a log chain three inches thick. And at midnight he broke the chain and came howling to the house. There was a furrow in the ground from his tail, he had it so far between his legs."

WELL, THEY WANDERED AROUND THE PLACE all day, but there was always something to bring up the same story. There was a hummock in the hay meadow by the creek.

"That's where one of them buried himself" said Jimmy Latterdale. "He had to come down here and dig his own grave and bury himself. He'd have been better off if he'd have hanged himself without any nonsense."

"How did he cover himself after he was in the grave?"

"Papa said he pulled the grave in after him, but I don't know how he did it either."

"Let's dig him up and see if there's really someone there."

"No sir. Anybody that digs down there doesn't walk away from here alive."

"Has anybody ever tried it?"

"Everybody has better sense than to try it."

They worked a while mending the little dam to bring up the water level. And after the water in the hole was about waist deep they went swimming.

"There was one of them drowned himself right here. It looks like its shallow all the way, but sometimes there's a hole that isn't there all the time. And one of them went down in it. It doesn't have any bottom."

They went back to the house and loaded a couple of large cans of water on a hay rick to take them out to the fields. This was the last day of the threshing. They still threshed at that time.

The father of Jimmy Latterdale gave them some more details as he cooled off.

"It's about every seven years it happens, and always just on the last day of the threshing. It's been just seven years since we had one. I wouldn't be surprised if we had one tonight. I guess you boys better stay in bed after you go there

tonight. I'd like to see you both at breakfast in the morning."

THAT NIGHT AFTER SUPPER they listened to the radio, and then they all played cards till it was late. On the last pot the rule was always that as soon as one lost his pile he had to go to bed.

And then a couple of hours later.

"What time is it?"

"It's ten minutes till eleven."

"How can you tell?"

"Jorgensens' red calf starts to bawl at ten. And at ten thirty the windmill makes a groan when the wind shifts, and that was twenty minutes ago. We can tell when it's eleven, the little ford always pulls away from Kenyons then and it back-fires."

"I'll go out if you will."

"All right. We can go out at eleven and stay for fifty-nine minutes and leave before the ghost gets there."

They went out the window and onto the roof and down a pillar. They got a lantern in the milk shed and went out to the little room above the corn crib.

"I don't have anything to worry about. My name's Latterdale. We live here and the ghost never hurts us. But what if the name of all of them is your name? Boy, you gotta hang yourself then."

"I'm not afraid of it. I only believe about half of it anyhow."

THEY LISTENED while the hoot

owl sounded in the brake, which it always did at a quarter after eleven. They heard the old jack snort in the lot as he always did at eleven thirty. And when the younger dogs scented weasel and gave voice they knew it was a quarter to twelve.

"We'd better each get one foot on the ladder so we can get down fast when he comes."

"Will we leave the lantern on?"

"Leave it on. When he comes he'll blow it out and then we can run. Like as not Shep will howl two seconds before he comes and that'll give us time to get away."

"I might just stay and see what he looks like. I might stay and see how scared I get before I have to run."

Old Joe the work horse snickered so they knew it was five till twelve.

"Maybe we'd better go now. He might come early."

"No. Let's wait a little while."

They heard the sighing in the cottonwoods by the water tank and knew that it was two minutes till twelve.

"Let's go. That wind is him and he's only a hundred yards away. We'd better go now."

And then they heard a hair-stiffening howl from old Shep and knew they had only two seconds before the ghost would be there.

Jimmy Latterdale went down the ladder and ran. Jimmy Johnston also started down the ladder.

FROM HERE ON there are two

versions of what happened, and there seems no way to reconcile them. Both boys were unshakeable in their stories and they could not both be true. This is what makes the verifying of odd happenings so difficult.

Jimmy Latterdale gave his story.

"You stepped on my fingers twice coming down the ladder so I know you weren't very far behind me. The only reason I got here first is that you fell down and got behind. Then you went to the milk shed till you settled down so I wouldn't know you'd been crying."

And the version of Jimmy Johnston, which for all we know may be the true one was this:

"I decided to stay and see what he was like so I went back up the ladder. He came in like the wind but the lantern didn't quite blow out. He was wild and wooley and his eyes bugged out like a cow's in the dehorning chute. His neck was purple and black from the rope burns and he still had the noose around it.

"What's your name, boy?" he asked, and he sounded like a bull frog only twice as loud.

"Jimmy Johnston' I said, and I don't know what I sounded like. 'Let's just try this on for size' he said. 'Johnson was the name of the man who got me hung. They say a noose is like a necktie, it will fit anyone.' So he took it off his neck and put it on mine. 'Now just throw the other end over that rafter and

then pull till you pull yourself off the floor. And be careful you don't let go of it till after you're dead. And if you don't hang yourself I've got something a lot worse for you.' I wasn't scared then, but I was a little bit worried. I threw the rope over the rafter and started to pull. It's hard to pull yourself up that way. Then I said, 'It doesn't seem fair to make me hang myself just because my name is Johnston. I'm not the one that got you hanged. I wasn't even around then.'

" 'My God' said the ghost, 'did you say your name was Johnston? I thought it was Johnson. I don't have any quarrel with the Johnstons. Give me back my rope and get out of here.

"So I left there after I talked to him a little while. But he told me one more thing. 'Don't ever tell anyone the name I'm looking for. If you tell anyone it's Johnson I'll come back and kill you.' O, I forgot about that. I shouldn't have told it. Now I'm done for."

SO THERE WAS AN ARGUMENT all the next morning about which of the boys told the true story.

But Old Shep knew. He growled at Jimmy Johnston as he smelled the ghost on him. For he may have -rown silly and forgetful with age, but he remembered that smell and he knew that Jimmy'd had the dead man's rope around his neck. □



NIGHT BEAT



RAMSEY
CAMPBELL

ALMOST EXACTLY THREE WEEKS AGO, Constable Sloane had visited the exhibition. Now, as he stood outside the museum at midnight, his thoughts were elsewhere. Streetlamps marched up the hill on which he stood, their lights padded by mist; cars laboured up the carriageway, reached the summit and sped away—but he hardly noticed their speed or their numbers, for his thoughts had returned to the murder.

It has been the night of the day on which he had visited the exhibition. What mattered, though, was that it had been his first month on a beat; and it mattered more that when his radio had called him to view the corpse, thrown broken among the bricks of a disintegrating alley leading from one of his main roads, the older policemen who had discovered the body had had to drive him back to the station, where he had sat white and shaking, gulping cups of tea. Of course his superiors had been sympathetic: he was young, he had never seen death before—they had even excluded him from the investigation which would be concen-

trated on his beat, and insisted that he confine himself to the calmer city centre for a while. He had barely been able to persuade them not to give him a companion, for he knew that it had not been the corpse which had left him shaking, not the mutilations or the blood. When he looked back on that night, he felt that he had been shaking with shame and fury: for he could have led them to the murderer.

And he had been furious because he knew that they would never have countenanced his method. Intuition was no part of police procedure. Yet ever since his childhood he had been able intuitively to sense sources of violence. He felt profoundly what his superiors wearily accepted: that violence surrounds us all. His first beat had led him through both suburbia and slums; and if each broken bottle outside a pub hinted terror to him, equally he felt the presence of violence in quiet suburban roads behind the ranks of sleeping cars, knew instinctively which set of patterned curtains concealed shouts of rage, the smash of china, screams. Sometimes he was honest with himself, and admitted that it was the violence buried in him that recognized these sources, reached out to them. But now this was forgotten, for never had he felt the imminence of violence so powerfully as here. When they'd moved him to the city centre neither he nor they had

realized what they had done. Last night he had passed the museum and had come alert; tonight he knew. Within the museum lay the source of that murder.

His radio hissed and spat. For a second he thought of calling Central for help, but then he half-smiled bitterly: he had no evidence, they would only think that the murder had unbalanced him completely. Yet he was determined to act; once he had conquered his fear of the surrounding violence he had become obsessed with the suppression of violence—and as well, this murder had stained his beat. He thrust the radio into his pocket and started up the steps to the museum.

WHEN HE KNOCKED on the doors the glass panes shuddered. They were a meagre protection against the violence within. After a minute Sloane saw a light bobbing closer through the wide dark foyer. As the light found Sloane and held him, a figure formed darkly about it; a face swelled from the shadows like a wrinkled half-inflated balloon. At a childhood party Sloane had dulled and grown more taciturn as the evening wore on; tired of trying to rouse him to play, the other children had buffeted him with balloons. "What's all this about, son?" the caretaker demanded.

Now that the doors of the museum were open the sense of violence seemed stronger; Sloane

could scarcely remember his lies. "A routine check, sir," he said.

"What routine's that, son? What's up?"

"We've had a few robberies around here recently. I'd like to look around, if you don't mind. Just to check."

The watchman hawked and gave Sloane room to pass. The foyer was high, reaching above the light; Sloane felt the cold arch of the ceiling. The walls were walled by darkness; painted faces glimmered dimly in the void. "Can we have the lights on, please?" Sloane asked.

"You'd have to ask the curator for that, son. But he'll be home in bed." He was obviously triumphant. Sloane frowned and the man came closer, nipping Sloan's arm with his fingers and apologizing with a lopsided alcoholic smile. "You can have my torch for a few minutes if you ask nicely."

"I'm sure you don't want to obstruct the law. You seem a bit unsteady—perhaps you ought to sit down."

"You can't have it unless I've got a spare battery." The caretaker sidled into his office behind the marble staircase and rummaged in the drawers of a dark table. Above the table a white lampshade was bearded with a single strand of cobweb; on the table, next to a sagging moist rectangle outlined in rum, lay an open copy of *True*

Detective Confessions. "You're lucky," the caretaker said, passing Sloane the torch.

Sloane felt violence massing in the room. "I won't be long," he said.

"Don't you worry your head about that, son. I'll come round with you."

As Sloane emerged from the office the torch's beam touched a globe of the world standing at the entrance to the Planetarium. Above the globe a moon was balanced on a wire; a dim crescent coated its edge. Sloane crossed to the staircase and the crescent expanded. At the same time the caretaker moved behind him. Sloane flexed his shoulders as if to shake off the violence which he felt looming.

The staircase climbed through a void across which their footsteps rang. The marble was slippery and sharp; Sloane glanced back at the caretaker and hurried to the top. A finger on a marble pillar pointed to *THE HISTORY OF MAN*. The torch-beam led him through an archway and fastened on a crumpled yellow paper mask inexpertly smoothed: a mummy's face.

"These are their specimens, here," the caretaker said behind him. "This is where thieves would be hiding, son, among the bodies, eh?"

He can move faster than I thought, Sloane realized. He peered at the man behind him, redolent of alcohol, one hand on a

case containing the dark handle of a Cro-Magnon jaw. The air was thick with inertia; even the violence hung inert, and the caretaker seemed embalmed as the mummy. "Not here," Sloane said.

As he crossed the marble landing, his heels clanking like boots of armour, Sloane felt the violence swell to meet him. He halted, afraid. "I'll show you this room, son," the caretaker said. "It's where I take my pride."

The torch-beam splayed out beyond the figure of the caretaker, a star of darkness shone from his limbs; Sloane moved aside to see at once what was beyond the second archway. As the light plunged in, moons sprang up in glass-cases, slid from the blades of swords and axes. "Tell me those aren't good as new," the caretaker said. "They can't say I don't keep these clean, son, that's a fact. I'd be in here like a shot if I heard a thief. Take his head off quick as that, I would."

Aggression stirred. "You wouldn't need me, then," Sloane said.

"When you've seen as much as I have, son, then I'll need you."

Although he could feel the violence mounting Sloane half-laughed: here they were quarrelling among the ready naked blades, yet no word was ever worth a blow. And as the violence ebbed from him, he located its source at last. It lay beneath his feet. "I haven't time to argue," he said,

and ran.

THE VOID BEYOND the staircase clanged about him; the caretaker shouted; Sloane's radio crackled and called out; in the shaft of light paintings, pillars, stairs leapt and swayed. Sloane's ankles trembled as he landed on the marble of the foyer. Then he ran past the moon on the globe, which vibrated and began to swing as he rushed by, into the Planetarium.

The arc of the torch-beam streaked across the false sky like a comet; on the ceiling stars sparkled and were gone. Beyond the ranks of benches leading down to the stage, Sloane saw a glass case. At once the air snapped taut. Within the case violence was trapped. Outside, in the foyer, the caretaker swore and clattered closer. Sloane switched off the torch and felt his way forward down the aisle.

He had never been afraid of darkness; it had been the moon that he had feared in childhood, never more so that on the night of the party. But now the darkness seemed a mass of weapons, any one of which might mutilate him. His entire body prickled; each nerve felt the imminence of some poised threat. He could hear faint footsteps, but the room was full of echoes; his pursuer might be at any distance on either side of him. Sloane had failed to count the benches. His hand groped forward from what he had assumed to be

the last bench. His fingers touched another, rose and felt the darkness. Moist breath clung to them, and they recoiled from a face.

As Sloane fell back, struggling with the torch, the beam sprang between his fingers. He was close to the glass case, and the caretaker was inches from him. "I thought you'd be here, son," the caretaker said. "What's the game? Trying to twist an old man?"

The caretaker moved in front of the glass case. His face came at Sloane, nodding like a balloon. Instinct leapt and Sloane struck out, punching blindly as he had the children at the party. Gasping, the caretaker fell beside the case. And Sloane saw the sign which the man's body had concealed.

He had seen the sign before, on the day of the murder. Before his mind was overwhelmed he had time to remember and realize. Last time had been in daylight; the sun had helped him for a few hours, but they hadn't won. Already the sign was meaningless; all meaning was contained in the grey stone within the case, beneath the sign LUNAR ROCK.

Sloane felt his mouth forced open from within. His skin ached as if a million needles were being forced through. But they were hairs; and his shoulders slumped as his hands weighed down his arms, formed into claws, and dragged him at last to stare down at the unconscious caretaker. □



Robert Silverberg is an author so prolific that you'd suspect him of being a hack if you saw a list of books that he'd written without having read any. As a matter of fact, none of his books I have to hand have such a list; probably lack of room. But Mr. Silverberg is no hack. His writing is always so craftsmanlike, his ideas so serviceable, that I find myself feeling guilty because his books don't turn me on more than they do.

On hand are his two latest novels—at least I think they're his two latest. There may have been five in between, and by the time this sees print, there may be five more. But I have before me two recent Silverberg novels—let's put it that way—and I am challenged into defining what's good about them, and what I do not find quite good enough. They are *The Book of Skulls* and *Dying Inside* (both hard cover from Scribner's), the latter being the more recent. I'll tackle it first, because I'm clearer in my positive and negative reactions there.

It's premise is pellucidly simple. A contemporary human being has a wild talent—that of penetrating minds. I use the word penetrate because it is a bit more than reading; at times he can go deeper, sense more than the surface action, as it were. Other than that, he is perfectly ordinary. Maybe too ordinary. This is not a supernatural premise, obviously, but neither is it presented as sci-fi. The "if" factor is just there, and Silverberg has made it in a sense minimal, just that one, relatively small fantasy element in a relentlessly realistic milieu. His protagonist, David Selig, is a New Yorker and a Jew. His life, as he tells it in disconnected flashbacks, is full of the stuff of our time; the riots at Columbia University, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, reactions to the rising black consciousness, etc. All of his dwelling places in New York

BOO KREVIEW

BAIRD SEARLES



2 MOORCOCK,

2 MORE SILVERBERG

are pinpointed with specific accuracy; in fact, all the locales, including certain subway stations, are detailed exactly.

This determined realism, by all logic, should make the fantastic element all the more convincing (though I wonder if it would to a non-New Yorker, at least *apropos* places), and it does. Selig becomes aware of his "gift" as a child, very purposefully keeps it hidden from others though revealing it accidentally to his adopted sister, falls in love with two girls (at different times), loses both because of the talent in different ways, meets another man who also has the talent, and winds up a barely surviving failure, making a living by ghost writing papers for Columbia students. He tells his story at the time he is 41 and losing his hair and his talent.

This is all carried off very well, and I think Silverberg is postulating that this sort of talent, wild though it may be, is like any other talent; it is what the particular individual makes it. Nyquist, the other man with the same power, is contrasted sharply to Selig; he uses it very differently. Selig is passive, a loser from the start, alienated not only by his difference, but his Jewishness, which he makes a good deal of. In fact, stated as we are in mainstream fiction by the Jewish experience, from Partway on back, this really seems more of the same with a fantastic element tacked on. Mainstream authors are more and more getting into the fantastic and surreal. Silverberg seems rather perversely to be going in the other direction. I assume fantasy/sci-fi/supernatural fiction is read for the magic, of whatever flavor, it contains. Reduce that to the pedestrian, and why read it? As well done as this book is, I found David Selig rather dull, his use of his fantastic power rather dull, and as a result, I found the novel rather dull. Ad-

mirably restrained as Silverberg is in not resorting to melodrama, there's nothing much there to take its place.

The Book of Skulls is a bit more ambitious, a bit more mysterious, and a bit more interesting. The premise: while poking about among uncatalogued esoterica in this university (obviously Harvard, though unnamed) library, a student finds an antique manuscript referring to an ancient brotherhood whose members attain immortality through a rigid physical and spiritual discipline. By coincidence, he also sees a current newspaper article referring to what seems to be the same brotherhood having recently settled in the American Southwest. On the chance that it is the same, and that they can do what the manuscript says they can do, the collegiate and three classmates drive from New England to Arizona (during Easter vacation, significantly). There must be four of them, because according to the manuscript, initiates must enter by fours, one of whom must be killed by the others, a second of whom must kill himself, and the remaining two, their lives paid for by the sacrifices, to be accepted into the discipline of immortality.

Again, with even more excuse for melodrama, given this arcane set up, Silverberg avoids it. A good part of the novel is spent just getting our heroes to Arizona, and once there, everything falls out almost by blueprint. This book, too, is really a look at recognizable human types, explored in some depth, and their reaction to a single fantastic factor. In essence what we have is four character studies; the narrative is advanced with chapters in the first person rotated among the four, and I think the problem for me is that I found none of them particularly interesting, likeable or convincing, despite Silverberg's amazing talent for farming the trivia of our

times into at least the simulacra of in-depth personality. The four are Eli, the discoverer, an urban Jew with a mystical bent, almost a preliminary sketch for the hero of *Dying Inside*; Ned, an Irish Catholic bisexual esthete; Timothy, a rich WASP New Englander; Oliver, a poor farm boy from the Midwest with Bible belt hangups. Despite, or perhaps because of, the infinite details that the author pours into sketching each, they still emerge only as types, and I found myself not giving a damn as to who bought it and who lived forever.

I did enjoy, however, the description of the Brotherhood of the Skulls, once we got there; possibly because it was the fantastic element (which, after all, is why I read fantasy), but also because it's very nicely done. Silverberg's talent for the real works here; the whole set up is nicely understated, but you really feel that there is a sort of braiding, alien difference about the place and its inhabitants.

Incidentally, proponents of Lady's Lib aren't going to be terribly happy about his work. Females are used throughout the trip exclusively as sex objects, and once at the House of Skulls, we find them being kept about as domestic animals for the brothers to practice sexual disciplines, a real male chauvinist's dream.

As I said, I feel guilty about not being as turned on by Silverberg's work as I feel I should, given the obvious talent, work, and craft that goes into them. I think that some day all this will jell with exactly the right theme, and then we'll have a truly extraordinary novel to contend with. I look forward to it.

* * *

TO GO FROM THE ALL-TOO-REAL to the un', Elric is back. Elric is back! Would that we could shout it from the highest tower of Immryr, the Dreaming City, capital of Melniboné, the Bright

Empire, whose last ruler was Elric; but Immryr is no more, because Elric himself brought destruction to it, in the last days when the Young Kingdoms, those of that species called human to which the Melnibonians did not quite belong, were rising and Melniboné was waning, with all its familiarity with the supernatural realms of the Higher Worlds . . .

Man, that kind of thing is hard to keep up! But Michael Moorcock certainly can, at least when writing about Elric. To those one or two of you out there who may not know about Elric, he is, I would say, the precursor of the current sword and sorcery crowd. Oh, Conan and the Grey Mouser were around long before he was, but their genre didn't even have a name then. But Elric's appearance on the scene roughly coincided with their revival, and that along with Tolkienmania brought forth the current vogue for those novels that are blessedly free from any link to the here and now, much to the disgust of those professional sci-fi types who think that fiction must necessarily Say Something.

In any case, sword and sorcery comes, like Baskin-Robbins ice cream, in a lot of flavors, and I like Elric's because it is the darkest fudge. Elric is really a prototypical anti-hero, bringing about the destruction of his own people because of a certain latent streak of humanity (random thought—Isn't it odd that mankind's best impulses are called humanitarian), but never feeling at home, as it were, with the totally human inhabitants of his world. There are also those Higher Worlds always mucking about with Elric's world, giving that feeling of greater-than-human forces manipulating things that is so necessary for a true epic feeling. Here it is the Lords of Chaos against the Lords of Law, a more viable conflict in this day and age than just plain old Good and Evil. And the narrative

must be kept 'bouncing along with a constant stream of invention that is outrageous but consistent, surprising but "right" in context. Moorcock carries it off beautifully here.

The first two Elric books were published in the early 60s. Since then, Moorcock has attempted other multi-volume s&s series: that were clever and imaginative, but just didn't catch me up as the Elric stories had. Therefore my intense pleasure at the new ones, and even greater pleasure that they are as good as ever. Taking the four as a series, I'd guess that the first two, *The Stealer of Souls* and *Stormbringer*, are numbers 2 and 4, respectively; the new ones (from *Lancer*, incidentally), *The Dreaming City* and *The Sleeping Sorceress*, are #1 and #3. The first concerns matters of Elric's life before he brought down the Young Kingdoms on his own people; the third are incidents during his wandering years, after the fall of Melniboné (primarily the continuing conflict with the sorcerer Theleb K'aarna) but before the final cosmic

battle of Law and Chaos chronicled in *Stormbringer*. Incidentally, Moorcock's nomenclature (always a surprisingly influential factor in s&s) is as ever competent, but I always found the name of Theleb K'aarna's home country too close to an old Southern expression for comfort. "Pan Tang" indeed!

In any case, the flavor is as nasty and, yes, neurotic as ever, and there are some fine new devices, such as a wall of living flesh that smother a whole army, a city entirely populated by thieves and beggars so graphically described as to make the reader a bit queasy, and a sardonic demon that is not funny enough to spoil the mood, but who has an extremely tart tongue. And for those of you who know others of Moorcock's series, I might note that the Runestaff makes a cameo appearance.

But what need to say more? Elric is back, and if he's your cup of tea, be informed that it is still the same excellent brew. □



Author's Page

FRITZ LEIBER, author of *Conjure Wife*, this issue's classic feature, is famous for his stories of heroic fantasy, although he is also a science-fiction writer of considerable note. His most popular creations, the barbarian swordsmen Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, have appeared in many of the fantasy magazines, and their adventures have been collected into several volumes, among them *Swords Against Death* and *Swords in the Mist*. *Conjure Wife*, perhaps the best-known of Leiber's supernatural works, was made into the motion picture *Burn, Witch, Burn*—the *Rosemary's Baby* of two decades ago. Other Leiber novels include *Gather, Darkness!* and *The Wanderer*, the latter of which won him the Hugo Award, science-fiction fandom's Oscar.

HARLAN ELLISON, who appears in this issue with "Neon," has been writing science fiction and fantasy for over sixteen years; his stories and screenplays have made him the most honored science fiction writer in the field's history. One of his stories, "'Repent, Horlequin,' Said the Ticktockman," winner of both the Hugo and Nebula awards, is now the fourth-most anthologized story in the English language. "Neon" is part of a forthcoming collection called *Deathbird Stories*, to be published by Charles Scribner's Sons in the fall; other of Ellison's anthologies due this year are *Approaching Oblivion* and *The Harlan Ellison Hornbook*. Besides writing a prolific amount of prose fiction, Harlan is also one of Hollywood's most energetic scenarists; as we write this, he's already completed negotiations for a special one-hour television show to be broadcast in the spring, a pilot for a series titled *THE DARK FORCES*. Watch for it. (And if you like it,

Ellison requests you make your opinion known to the executives of NBC, the network running the show.) (End of free plug.)

R.A. LAFFERTY, the mind behind this issue's whimsical "Ghost in the Corn Crib," is also the author of *The Fall of Rome*, *Past Master*, *Strange Doings*, and the current best-selling *Okla Hannali*. Like another famed science-fiction writer, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Lafferty uses the form to explore the foibles and glories of mankind—taking occasional side-trips into humorous fantasy, as in "Ghost." His work is only now being discovered by the larger reading public, an event which we anticipate with vicarious pleasure. We hope to be featuring more stories by Lafferty in our future issues.

RAMSEY CAMPBELL, author of "Night Beot," has been writing weird fiction for over ten years. His earliest stories appear in Arkham House's 1962 collection, *Dark Mind, Dark Heart*; even so, Ramsey Campbell is one of the youngest writers of horror fiction—he was only eighteen when his first story saw print, the youngest writer ever published by Arkham House. Though he is perhaps best known for his contributions to the continuing "Cthulhu Mythos," Ramsey is quite adept at fashioning horror of a more traditional—though hardly commonplace—weave, as he proves in "Night Beot." Other collections in which Ramsey's stories have appeared are: *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants*, 1964, Arkham House, *Over the Edge*, 1964, Arkham House, and, more recently, *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, 1969, also from Arkham House.

DAVID R. BUNCH, represented this issue with "Seeing Stingy Ed," is one of fantasy's most original talents. For over a dozen years his stories—terse, concise and

biting—have been appearing in all of the major genre magazine, as well as in several literary "little" magazines. Recently, Avon Books collected a few of them—all set in a consistent world of the future, after the passing of flesh-and-blood humans—in a book called *Moderan*.

BEVERLY GOLDBERG tells us she's an editor of children's books, which might explain the finely-drawn child protagonist of "A Nice Home." Ms. Goldberg has apparently only recently turned from editing fiction to writing it—and we, at least, applaud her decision.

DENNIS O'NEIL, this issue's guest lecturer in "The Lurker in the Family Room," is probably most easily recognized for his comic magazine scripting, as writer of the award-winning *Green Lantern* series of "relevant" comics published by National Periodicals a year ago. However, the astute reader knows that comics is only one of Mr. O'Neil's many literary hats; Denny

has functioned, at various times, as a journalist, magazine editor, historian, teacher, novelist, scenarist, essayist and craftsman of the short story form. His stories have appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Amazing*, *Fantastic*, *Fantasy* and *Science Fiction*, *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine*—and have been featured in several anthologies, including *David Gerrold's Generation*. We hope to have one of Denny's more arcane stories—dealing with sorcery in Middle America—for our next issue.

JOHN K. DIOMEDE was born in New Orleans, picking up the weird and arcane atmosphere of that city for use in his stories. As mentioned earlier, "The First Step" is the beginning of a series of gothic horror adventure stories set over the past several decades. In his spare time, Mr. Diomedé is a sod-buster for the New York Yankees ground crew. □

(continued from page 3)

more horror, more tales of the macabre. Perhaps the best way to illustrate our intentions is to point to the serial featured in this issue, Fritz Leiber's classic novel, *CONJURE WIFE*. We wanted to lead off our first issue with a story that would clearly indicate our tastes, a story that we considered the ideal—and we could think of no better book than Leiber's. It contains all that we think a novel of horror and the supernatural should contain: mystery, ex-

citement, suspense, believable characters in an all-too-believable situation. This is our ideal. This is the sort of story you can expect in future issues of *THE HAUNT OF HORROR*.

THE UNSPOKEN INVITATION. It's been made, and the light is already piercing the fog over the moon. Will the stranger see it? Will he have the courage to follow the light to its source, to accept the invitation? Perhaps. We'll see. □

(continued from page 55)

As Mrs. Carr topped it with her ace, Norm was conscious of her wrinkled lips fixed in a faint cryptic smile.

After that hand, Tansy served refreshments. Norman followed her to the kitchen.

"Did you see the looks she kept giving you?" she whispered gaily to Norman. "I sometimes think the bitch is in love with you."

He chuckled. "You mean Evelyn?"

"Of course not. Mrs. Carr. Inside she's a glamor girl. Haven't you ever seen her looking at the students, wishing she had the outside too?"

Norman remembered he'd been thinking the very thing that morning.

Tansy continued, "I'm not trying to flatter myself when I say I've caught her looking at me in the same way. It gives me the creeps."

Norman nodded. "She reminds me of the Wicked—" he caught himself.

"—Witch in Snow White? Yes. And now you'd better run along, dear, or they'll be bustling out here to remind me that a Hampnell man's place is definitely not in the kitchen."

When he returned to the living room, the usual shop talk had started.

"Saw Pollard today," Gunnison remarked, helping himself to a section of chocolate cake. "Told me

he'd be meeting with the trustees tomorrow morning, to decide among other things on the sociology chairmanship."

Hervey Sawtelle choked on a crumb and almost upset his cup of cocoa.

Norman caught Mrs. Sawtelle glaring at him vindictively. She changed her face and murmured, "How interesting." He smiled. That kind of hate he could understand. No need to confuse it with witchcraft.

He went to the kitchen to get Mrs. Carr a glass of water, and met Mrs. Gunnison coming out of the bedroom. She was slipping a leatherbound booklet into her capacious handbag. It recalled to his mind Tansy's diary. Probably an address book.

Totem slipped out from behind her, hissing decorously as she dodged past her feet.

"I loathe cats," said Mrs. Gunnison bluntly and walked past him.

Professor Carr had made arrangements for a final rubber, men at one table, women at the other.

"A barbaric arrangement," said Tansy, winking. "You really don't think we can play bridge at all."

"On the contrary, my dear, I think you play very well," Carr replied seriously. "But I confess that at times I prefer to play with men. I can get a better idea of what's going on in their minds. Whereas women still baffle me."

"As they should, dear," added Mrs. Carr, bringing a flurry of laughter.

The cards suddenly began to run freakishly, with abnormal distribution of suits, and play took a wild turn. But Norman found it impossible to concentrate, which made Sawtelle an even more jittery partner than usual.

He kept listening to what the women were saying at the other table. His rebellious imagination persisted in reading hidden meanings into the most innocuous remarks.

"You usually hold wonderful hands, Tansy. But tonight you don't seem to have any," said Mrs. Carr. But suppose she was referring to the kind of hand you wrapped in flannel?

"Oh, well, unlucky in cards . . . you know." How had Mrs. Sawtelle meant to finish the remark? Lucky in love? Lucky in sorcery? Idiotic notion!

"That's two psychic bids you've made in succession, Tansy. Better watch out. We'll catch up with you." What might not a psychic bid stand for in Mrs. Gunnison's vocabulary? Some kind of bluff in witchcraft? A pretense at giving up conjuring?

"I wonder," Mrs. Carr murmured sweetly to Tansy, "if you're hiding a very strong hand this time dear, and making a trap pass?"

Rubber ruler. That was the trouble with imagination. According to

a rubber ruler, an elephant would be no bigger than a mouse, a jagged line and a curve might be equally straight. He tried to think about the slam he had contracted for.

"The girls talk a good game of bridge," murmured Gunnison in an undertone.

Gunnison and Carr came out at the long end of a two-thousand rubber and were still crowing pleasantly as they stood around waiting to leave.

Norman remembered a question he wanted to ask Mrs. Gunnison.

"Harold was telling me you had a number of photographs of that cement dragon or whatever it is on top of Estrey. It's right opposite my window."

She looked at him for a moment, then nodded.

"I believe I've got one with me. Took it almost a year ago."

She dug a crumpled snapshot out of her handbag.

He studied it, and experienced a kind of shiver in reverse. This didn't make sense at all. Instead of being toward the center of the roof ridge, or near the bottom, it was almost at the top. Just what was involved here? A practical joke stretching over a period of days or weeks? Or—His mind balked, like a skittish horse. Yet—*Eppur si muove*.

He turned it over. There was a confusing inscription on the back, in greasy red crayon. Mrs. Gun-

nison took it out of his hands, to show the others.

"The wind sounds like a lost soul," said Mrs. Carr, hugging her coat around her as Norman opened the door.

"But a rather talkative one—probably a woman," her husband added with a chuckle.

When the last of them were gone, Tansy slipped her arm around his waist, and said, "I must be getting old. It wasn't nearly as much of a trial as usual. Even Mrs. Carr's ghoulish flirting didn't bother me. For once they all seemed almost human."

Norman looked down at her intently. She was smiling peacefully. Totem had come out of hiding and was rubbing against her legs.

With an effort Norman nodded and said, "Yes, they did. But God, that cocoa! Let's have a drink!"

CHAPTER VII

THERE WERE SHADOWS EVERYWHERE, and the ground under Norman's feet was soft and quivering. The dreadful strident roaring, which seemed to have gone on since eternity began, shook his very bones. Yet it did not drown out the flat, nasty monotone of that other voice which kept telling him to do something—he could not be sure what, except that it involved injury to himself, although he heard the voice as plainly as if someone were talking inside his

head. He tried to struggle away from the direction in which the voice wanted him to go, but heavy hands jerked him back. He wanted to look over his shoulder at something he knew would be taller than himself, but he couldn't muster the courage. The shadows were made by great rushing clouds which would momentarily assume the form of gigantic faces brooding down on him, faces with pits of darkness for eyes, and sullen, savage lips, and great masses of hair streaming behind.

He must not do the thing the voice commanded. And yet he must. He struggled wildly. The sound rose to an earth-shaking pandemonium. The clouds became a black all-engulfing torrent.

And then suddenly the bedroom became mixed up with the other picture, and he struggled awake.

He rubbed his face, which was thick with sleep, and tried unsuccessfully to remember what the voice had wanted him to do. He still felt the reverberations of the sound in his ears.

Gloomy daylight seeped through the shades. The clock indicated quarter to eight.

Tansy was still curled up, one arm out of the covers. A smile was tickling the corners of her lips and wrinkling her nose. Norman slipped out carefully. His bare foot came down on a loose carpet tack. Suppressing an angry grunt, he hobbled off.

For the first time in months he botched shaving. Twice the new blade slid too sharply sideways, neatly removing tiny segments of skin. He glared irritably at the white-glazed, red-flecked face in the mirror, pulled the blade down his chin very slowly, but with a little too much pressure, and gave himself a third nick.

By the time he got down to the kitchen, the water he had put on was boiling. As he poured it into the coffee-pot, the wobbly handle of the saucepan came completely loose, and his bare ankles were splattered painfully. Totem skittered away, then slowly returned to her pan of milk. Norman cursed, then grinned. What had he been telling Tansy about the cussedness of things? As if to prove the point with a final ridiculous example, he bit his tongue while eating coffee cake. Cussedness of things? Say rather the cussedness of the human nervous system! Faintly he was aware of a potently disturbing and unidentifiable emotion—remnant of the dream?—like an unpleasant swimming shape glimpsed beneath weedy water.

It seemed most akin to a dull seething anger, for as he hurried toward Morton Hall, he found himself inwardly at war with the established order of things, particularly educational institutions. The old sophomoric exasperation at the hypocrisies and compromises of

civilized society welled up and poured over the dams that a mature realism had set against it. This was a great life for a man to be leading! Coddling the immature minds of grownup brats, and lucky to get one halfway promising student a year. Playing bridge with a bunch of old fogies. Catering to jittery incompetents like Hervey Sawtelle. Bowing to the thousand and one stupid rules and traditions of a second-rate college. And for what!

Ragged clouds were moving overhead, presaging rain. They reminded him of his dream. He felt the impulse to shout a childish defiance at those faces in the sky.

A truck rolled quietly by, recalling to his mind the little picture Evelyn Sawtelle had scribbled on the bridge pad. He followed it with his eyes. When he turned back, he saw Mrs. Carr.

"YOU'VE CUT YOURSELF," she said with sweet solicitude, peering sharply through her spectacles.

"Yes; I have."

"How unfortunate!"

He didn't even agree. They walked together through the gate between Estrey and Morton. He could just make out the snout of the cement dragon poked over the Estrey gutter.

"I wanted to tell you last night how distressed I was, Professor Saylor, about the matter of Margaret Van Nice, only of course,

it wasn't the right time. I'm dreadfully sorry that you had to be called in. Such a disgusting accusation! How you must have felt!"

She seemed to misinterpret his wry grimace at this, for she went on very swiftly, "Of course, I never once dreamed that *you* had done anything the least improper, but I thought there must be *something* to the girl's story. She told it in such *detail*." She studied his face with interest. The thick glass made her eyes big as an owl's. "Really, Professor Saylor, some of the girls that came to Hempnell nowadays are *terrible*. Where they get such loathsome ideas from is quite beyond me."

"Would you like to know?"

She looked at him blankly, an owl in daytime.

"They get them," he told her concisely, "from a society which seeks simultaneously to stimulate and inhibit one of their basic drives. They get them, in brief, from a lot of dirty-minded adults!"

"Really, Professor Saylor! Why—"

"There are a number of girls here at Hempnell who would be a lot healthier with real love affairs rather than imaginary ones. A fair proportion, of course, have already made satisfactory adjustments."

He had the satisfaction of hearing her gasp as he abruptly turned into Morton. His heart was pounding pleasantly. His lips were tight. When he reached his office

he lifted the phone and asked for an on-campus number.

"Thompson? . . . Saylor. I have a couple of news items for you."

"Good, good! What are they?" Thompson replied hungrily, in the tone of one who poises a pencil.

"First, the subject for my address to the Off-campus Mothers, week after next: 'Pre-marital Relations and the College Student.' Second, my theatrical friends—the Utells—will be playing in the city at the same time, and I shall invite them to be guests of the college."

"But—" The poised pencil have obviously been dropped like a red-hot poker.

"That's all, Thompson. Perhaps I shall have something more interesting another time. Good-by."

He felt a stinging sensation in his hand. He had been fingering the little obsidian knife. It had gashed his finger. Blood smeared the clear volcanic glass where once, he told himself, had been the blood of sacrifice or ritual scarification. Clumsy—he searched his desk for adhesive bandages. The drawer where he remembered putting them was locked. He opened it and there was the slim-barreled revolver he had taken from Theodore Jennings. The buzzer sounded. He shut the drawer, locked it again, ripped a strip of cloth from his handkerchief, and hurriedly tied it around the dripping wound.

As he hurried down the corridor,

Bronstein fell into step with him.

"We're pulling for you this morning, Dr. Saylor," he murmured heartily.

"What do you mean?"

Bronstein's grin was a trifle knowing. "A girl who works in the president's office told us they were deciding on the sociology chairmanship. I sure hope the old buzzards show some sense for once."

Academic dignity stiffened Norman's reply. "In any case, I will be satisfied with their decision."

Bronstein felt the rebuff. "Of course, I didn't mean to—"

"Of course you didn't."

He immediately regretted his sharpness. Why the devil should he rebuke a student for failing to reverence trustees as representatives of deity? Why pretend he didn't want the chairmanship? Why conceal his contempt for half the faculty? The anger he thought he had worked out of his system surged up with redoubled violence. On a sudden irresistible impulse he tossed his lecture notes aside and started in to tell the class just what he thought of the world and Hempnall. They might as well find out young!

Fifteen minutes later he came to with a jerk in the middle of a sentence about "dirty-minded old women, in whom greed for social prestige has reached the magnitude of a perversion." He could not remember half of what he had been saying. He searched the faces of his

class. They looked excited, but puzzled, most of them, and a few looked shocked. Gracine Pollard was glaring. Yes! He remembered now that he had made a neat but nasty analysis of the political ambitions of a certain college president who could be none other than Randolph Pollard. And somewhere he had started off on that pre-marital relations business, and had been ribald about it, to say the least. And he had—

Exploded. Like a Prince Rupert drop.

HE FINISHED OFF WITH HALF A DOZEN LAME GENERALITIES. He knew they must be quite inappropriate, for the looks grew more puzzled.

But the class seemed very remote. A shiver was spreading downward from the base of his skull, all because a few words that had printed themselves in his mind.

The words were: A fingernail has flicked a psychic filament.

He shook his head, jumbling the type. The words vanished.

There were thirty minutes of class time left. He wanted to get away. He announced a surprise quiz, chalked up two questions, and left the room. In his office, he noticed that the cut finger had started to bleed again through the bandage. He remembered that there had been blood on the chalk.

And dried blood on the obsidian knife. He resisted the impulse to

finger it, and sat staring at the top of his desk.

It all went back to Tansy's witchcraft aberration, he told himself. It had shaken him much more than he had dared to admit. He had tried to put it out of his mind too quickly. And Tansy had appeared to forget it too quickly, too. A person could not shake an obsession that easily. He must thrash it all out with her, again and again, or the thing would fester.

What was he thinking! Tansy seemed so happy and relieved the last three days, that would surely be the wrong course to take.

But how could Tansy have got over a serious obsession so easily? It wasn't normal. He remembered her sleeping smile. Yet it wasn't Tansy who was behaving strangely now. It was he. As if a spell—What asinine rot! He'd just let himself be irritated by that stupid, hidebound old bunch of women, those old dragons—

His eyes instantly strayed toward the window, but the telephone recalled him.

"Professor Saylor? . . . I'm calling for Doctor Pollard. Could you come in and see Dr. Pollard this afternoon? . . . Four o'clock? Thank you."

He leaned back with a smile. At least, he told himself, he had got the chairmanship.

It grew darker as the day progressed, the ragged clouds swept lower and lower. Students

scurried along the walks. But the storm held off until almost four.

Big raindrops splattered the dusty steps as he ducked under the portico of the Administration Building. Thunder crackled and crashed, as if acres of metal sheeting were being shaken above the clouds. He turned back to watch. Lightning threw the Gothic roofs and towers into sharp relief. Again the crackle, building to a crash. He remembered he had left a window open in his office. But there was nothing that would be damaged by the wet.

Wind swooped through the portico with a strident, pulsating roar. The unmusical voice that spoke into his ear had the same quality.

"Isn't it a pretty storm?"

Evelyn Sawtelle was smiling for once. It had a grotesque effect on her features, as if a horse had suddenly discovered how to smirk.

"You've heard the news, of course?" She went on. "About Hervey."

Hervey popped out from behind her. He was grinning too, but embarrassedly. He mumbled something that was lost in the storm and extended his hand blindly, as if he were in a receiving line.

Evelyn never took her eyes off Norman. "Isn't it wonderful?" she said. "Of course, we expected it, but still—"

Norman guessed. He forced himself to grasp Hervey's hand, just as the latter was withdrawing it

flusteredly.

"Congratulations, old man," he said briefly.

"I'm very proud of Hervey," Evelyn announced possessively, as if he were a small boy who had won a prize for good behavior.

Her eyes followed Norman's hand. "Oh, you've cut yourself." The smirk seemed to be a permanent addition to her features. Then wind wailed fiendishly. "Come, Hervey!" And she walked out into the storm as if it weren't there.

Hervey goggled at her in surprise. He mumbled something apologetic to Norman, pumped his hand up and down again, and then obediently scampered after his wife.

Norman watched them. There was something unpleasantly impressive about the way Evelyn Sawtelle marched through the sheets of rain, getting both of them drenched to no purpose except to satisfy some strange obstinacy. He could see that Hervey was trying to hurry her and not succeeding. Lightning flared viciously, but there was no reaction apparent in her angular, awkward frame. Once again Norman became dimly aware of an alien, explosive emotion deep within him.

And so that little poodle dog of her, he thought, is to have the final say on the educational policy of the sociology department. Then what the devil does Pollard want to see me for? To offer his com-

misérations?

ALMOST AN HOUR LATER he slammed out of Pollard's office, tense with anger, wondering why he had not handed in his resignation on the spot. To be interrogated about his actions like some kid, on the obvious instigation of busybodies like Thompson and Mrs. Carr and Gracine Pollard! To have to listen to a lot of hogwash about his "attitudes" and "the Hempnell spirit," will veiled insinuations about his "moral code."

At least he had given somewhat better than he had taken! At least he had forced a note of confusion into that suave, oratorical voice, and made those tufted gray eyebrows pop up and down more than once!

He had to pass the Dean of Men's office. Mrs. Gunnison was standing at the door. Like a big, oozy, tough-skinned slug, he told himself, noting her twisted stockings and handbag stuffed full as a grab bag, the inevitable camera dangling beside it. His exasperation shifted to her.

"Yes, I cut myself!" he told her, observing the direction of her glance. His voice was hoarse from the tirade he had delivered to Pollard.

Then he remembered something and did not stop to weigh his words. "Mrs. Gunnison, you picked up my wife's diary last night . . . by mistake. Will you please give it to

me?"

"You're mistaken," she replied tolerantly.

"I saw you coming out of her bedroom with it."

Her eyes became lazy slits. "In that case you'd have mentioned it last night. You're overwrought, Norman. I understand." She nodded toward Pollard's office. "It must have been quite a disappointment."

"I'm asking you to return the diary!"

"And you'd really better look after that cut," she continued unruffledly. "It doesn't look any too well bandaged, and it seems to be bleeding. Infections can be nasty things."

He turned on his heel and walked away. Her reflection confronted him, murky and dim in the glass of the outer door. She was smiling.

Outside, Norman looked at his hand. Evidently he had opened the cut when he banged Pollard's desk. He drew the bandage tighter.

The storm had blown over. Yellow sunlight was flooding from under the low curtain of clouds to the west, flashing richly from the wet roofs and upper windows. Surplus rain was sprinkling from the trees. The campus was empty. A flurry of laughter from the girls' dormitories etched itself, a light, harmless acid, on the silence. He shrugged aside his anger and let his senses absorb the new-washed

beauty of the scene.

He prided himself on being able to enjoy the moment at hand. It seemed to him one of the chief signs of maturity.

He tried to think like a painter, identifying hues and shades, searching for the faint rose or green hidden in the shadows. There was really something to be said for Gothic architecture. Even though it was not functional, it carried the eye along pleasantly from one fanciful bit of stonework to the next! Now take those leafy finials topping the Estrey tower—

And then suddenly the sunlight was colder than ice, the roofs of Hempnell were like the roofs of hell, and the faint laughter like the crystalline cachinnations of fiends. Before he knew it, he had swerved sharply away from Morton, off the path and onto the wet grass, although he was only halfway across campus.

No need to go back to the office, he told himself shakily. Just a long climb for a few notes. They could wait until tomorrow. And why not go home a different way tonight? Why always take the direct route that led through the gate between Estrey and Morton, under those dark, overhanging ledges. Why—

He forced himself to look up again at the open window of his office. It was empty now, as he might have expected. That other thing must have been some moving blur in his vision, and imagination

had done the rest, as when a small shadow scurrying across the floor becomes a spider.

Or perhaps a shade flapping outward—

But a shadow could hardly crawl along the ledge outside the windows. A blur could hardly move so slowly or retain such a definite form.

And then the way the thing had waited, peering in, before it dropped down inside. Like . . . Like a—

Of course it was all nonsense. And there really was no need whatsoever to bother about fetching those notes or closing the window. It would be giving in to a momentary fear. There was a rumble of distant thunder.

—Like a very large lizard, the color and texture of stone.

CHAPTER VIII

“—AND HENCEFORTH HIS SOUL IS BELIEVED to be knit up in a manner with the stone. If it breaks, it is an evil omen for him; they say that thunder has struck the stone and that he who owns it will soon die—”

No use. His eyes kept wandering over the mass of print. He laid the volume of *The Golden Bough* aside and leaned back. From somewhere to the east, the thunder still throbbed faintly. But the familiar leather of the easy-chair imparted a sense of security and detachment.

Suppose, just as an intellectual exercise, he tried to analyze the misfortunes and fancies of the past three days in terms of sorcery.

The cement dragon would be a clear case of sympathetic magic. Mrs. Gunnison animated it by means of her photographs—the old business of doing things to the image instead of the object, like sticking pins in a wax doll. Perhaps she had joined a number of photographs together to make a *motion* picture. Or perhaps she had managed to get a picture of the inside of his office and had clipped a picture of the dragon to it. Murmuring suitable incantations, of course. Or, more simply, she might have slipped a picture of the dragon into one of his pockets. He started to feel through them, then reminded himself that this was only an intellectual exercise, a trifling diversion for a tired brain.

But carry through on it. You've exhausted Mrs. Gunnison. How about Evelyn Sawtelle? Her recording of the bull-roarer, notable storm-summoner, would provide a neat magical explanation for the wind last night and the storm and wind today—both associated with the Sawtelles. And then the similar sound in his dream—he wrinkled his nose in distaste.

He could hear Tansy calling Totem from the back porch, rattling her little tin pan.

Put today's self-injurious acts in another category. The obsidian

knife. The razor blade. The cranky saucepan. The carpet tack. The match that he had let burn his fingers a few minutes ago.

Perhaps the razor blade had been charmed, like the enchanted sword or ax which wounds the person who wields it. Perhaps someone had stolen the blood-smeared obsidian knife and dropped it in water, so the wound would keep flowing. That was a well-established superstition.

A dog was trotting along the sidewalk out in front. He could distinctly hear the clop-clop of paws.

Tansy was still calling Totem.

Perhaps a sorcerer had commanded him to destroy himself by inches—or millimeters, considering the razor blade. That would explain all the self-injurious acts at one swoop. The flat voice in the dream had ordered him to do it.

The dog had turned up the drive. His claws made a grating sound on the concrete.

The tarot-card diagrams scribbled by Mrs. Sawtelle would figure as some magical control mechanism. The stick-figure of the man and the truck had grim implications if interpreted in the light of his old irrational fear.

It really didn't sound so much like a dog. Probably the neighbor's boy dragging home by jerks some indeterminate bulky object. The neighbor's boy devoted all his spare time to collecting trash.

"Totem! Totem!" Followed by, "All right, stay out if you want to," and the sound of the back door closing.

Finally, that very trite "sense of a presence" just behind him. Taller than himself, hands poised to grab. Only whenever he looked over his shoulder, it dodged. Something resembling it had figured in the dream—the source, perhaps, of that flat voice. And in that case—

His patience snapped. An intellectual exercise all right! For morons! He stubbed out his cigarette.

"Well, I've done my duty. That cat can sing for her supper." Tansy sat on the arm of the chair and put her hand on Norman's shoulder. "How are things going?"

"Not so good," he replied lightly.

"The chairmanship?"

He nodded. "Sawtelle got it."

Tansy cursed fluently. It did him good to hear her.

"Make you want to take up conjuring again?" He bit his lip. He certainly hadn't intended to say that.

She looked at him closely.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Just a joke."

"Are you sure? I know you've been worrying about me these last few days, ever since you found out. Wondering if I were going totally neurotic on you, and watching for the next symptoms. Now, dear, you

don't have to deny it. It was the natural thing. I expected you'd be suspicious of me for a while. With your knowledge of psychiatry, it would be impossible for you to believe that anyone could shake off an obsession so quickly. And I've been so happy to get free from all that, that your suspicions haven't bothered me. I've known they would wear off."

"But, darling, I honestly haven't been suspicious," he protested. "Maybe I ought to have been, but I haven't."

Her gray-green eyes were sphinxlike. She said slowly, "Then what are you worrying about?"

"Nothing at all." Here was where he had to be very careful.

She shook her head. "That's not true. You are worrying. Oh, I know there are some things on your mind that you haven't told me about. It isn't that."

He looked up quickly.

She nodded. "About the chairmanship. And about some student who's been threatening you. And about that Van Nice girl. You didn't really think, did you, that Hempnell would let me miss those delightful scandals?" She smiled briefly as he started to protest. "Oh, I know you aren't the type who seduces love-struck mimeograph operators, not neurotic ones at any rate." She became serious again. "Those are all minor matters, things you can take in your stride. You didn't tell

me about them because you were afraid I might backslide from the desire to protect you. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"But I have the feeling that what you're worrying about goes much deeper than that. Yesterday and today I've even felt that you wanted to turn to me for help, and didn't dare."

HE PAUSED as if thinking exactly how to phrase his answer. But he was studying her face, trying to read the exact meaning of each familiar quirk of expression around the mouth and eyes. She looked very contained, but that was only a mask, he thought. Actually, in spite of everything she said, she must still be poised close to the brink of her obsession. One little push, such as a few careless words on his part—How the devil had he ever let himself get so enmeshed in his own worries and those ridiculous projections of his cranky imagination? Here a few inched away from him was the only thing that mattered—the mind behind this smooth forehead and these clear, gray-green eyes; to steer that mind away from any such ridiculous notions as those he had been indulging in, the last few days.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I *have* been worried about you. I thought it would hurt your self-confidence if I let you know. Maybe I was unwise—you seem to

have sensed it, anyway—but that's what I thought. The way you feel now, of course, it can't possible hurt you to know."

It occurred to him that it was almost frighteningly easy to lie convincingly to someone you loved.

She did not give in at once. "Are you sure?" she asked. "I still have the feeling there's more to it."

Suddenly she smiled and yielded to the pressure of his arms. "It must be the MacKnight in me—my Scotch ancestry," she said, laughing. "Awfully stubborn, you know. Monomaniacs. When we're crazy on a thing, we're completely crazy, but when we drop it, we drop it all at once. Like my great-uncle Peter. You know, the one who left the Presbyterian ministry and gave up Christianity on the very same day he proved to his satisfaction there was no God. Remember, at the age of seventy-two?" There was a long and grumbling roll of thunder.

The storm was coming back.

"Well, I'm very glad you're only worried about me," she continued. "It's complimentary, and I like it."

She was smiling happily, but there was still something enigmatic about the eyes, something withheld. As he was congratulating himself on carrying it off successfully, it suddenly occurred to him that two could play at the game of lying. She might be holding something back herself, with the idea of reassuring him. She

might be trying to protect him from her own blacker worries. Her subtlety might undercut his own. No sane reason to suspect that, and yet—

"Suppose I get us a drink," she said, "and we decide whether or not you leave Hempnell this year, and look for greener fields."

He nodded. She started around the bend in the L-shaped room.

—And yet, you could live with and love a person for fifteen years, and not know what was behind her eyes.

There was the rattle of glassware from the sideboard, and the friendly sound of a full bottle set down.

Then, timed to the thunder, but much closer, a shuddering, animal scream. It was cut off before Norman had sprung to his feet.

As he cleared the angle of the room, he saw Tansy going through the kitchen door. She was a little ahead of him down the back steps.

Light fanned out from the windows of the opposite house into the service yard. It revealed the sprawled body of Totem, head mashed flat against the concrete.

He heard a little sound start and stop in Tansy's throat. It might have been a gasp, or a sob, or a snarl.

The light revealed little more than the body. Norman moved so that his feet covered the two prominent scuffs in the concrete just beyond the body. They might have been caused by the impact of a

brick or heavy stone, perhaps the thing that had killed Totem, but there was something so suggestive about their relative position that he did not want Tansy's imagination to have a chance to work on them.

She lifted her face. It didn't show much emotion.

"You'd better go in," he said.

"You'll—"

He nodded. "Yes."

She stopped halfway up the stairs. "That was a rotten, rotten thing for anybody to do."

"Yes."

She left the door open. A moment later she came out and laid on the porch railing a square of heavy cloth, covered with shed hair. Then she went in again and shut the door.

He rolled up the cat's body and stopped at the garage for the spade. He did not spend time searching for any brick or heavy stone or other missile. Nor did he examine closer the heavy footmarks he fancied he saw in the grass beyond the service yard.

Lightning began to flicker as his spade bit into the soft ground by the back fence. He kept his mind strictly on the task at hand. He worked steadily, but without undue haste. When he patted down the last spadeful of earth and started for the house, the lightning flashed were stronger, making the moments in between even darker. A wind started up and dragged at the leaves.

He did not hurry. What if the lightning did indistinctly show him a large dog near the front of the house? There were several large dogs in the neighborhood. They were not savage. Totem had not been killed by a dog.

Deliberately he replaced the spade in the garage and walked back to the house. Only when he got inside and looked back through the screen did his thoughts break loose for a moment.

The lightning flash, brightest yet, showed the dog coming around the corner of the house. He had only a glimpse. A dog the color of concrete. It walked stiff-legged. He quickly closed the door and shot home the bolt.

Then he remembered that the study windows were open. He must close them. Quickly.

It might rain in.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN NORMAN ENTERED THE LIVING ROOM his face was outwardly serene. Tansy was sitting on the straight chair, leaning a little forward, an intent moody expression around her eyes. Her hands were playing absently with a bit of twine.

He carefully lit a cigarette.

"Do you want that drink now?" he asked, not too casually, not too sharply.

"No, thanks. You have one." Her hands kept on knotting and un-

knotting the twine.

He sat down and picked up his book. From the easy-chair he could watch her unobtrusively.

And now that he had no grave to dig or other mechanical task to perform, his thoughts were not to be denied. But at least he could keep them circling in a little isolated sphere inside his skull, without affecting either the expression of his face or direction of his other thoughts, which were protectively concentrated on Tansy.

"Sorcery *is*," went the thoughts inside the sphere. "Something has been conjured down from a roof. Women are witches fighting for their men. Tansy was a witch. She was guarding you. But you made her stop."

"In that case," he replied swiftly to the thoughts inside the sphere, "why isn't Tansy aware of what's happening? It can't be denied that she has acted very relieved."

"Are you sure she isn't aware or becoming aware?" answered the thoughts inside the sphere. "Besides, in losing her instruments of magic she probably lost her sensitivity to magic. Without *his* instruments—say microscope or telescope—a scientist would be no better able than a savage to see the germs of typhoid or the moons of Mars. His natural sensory equipment might even be inferior to that of the savage."

And the imprisoned thoughts buzzed violently, like bees seeking

escape from a stopped-up hive.

"Norman," Tansy said abruptly, without looking up at him, "You found and burned that hand in your watch charm, didn't you?"

He thought a moment. "Yes, I did," he said lightly.

"I'd really forgotten about that. There were so many."

He turned a page, and then another. Thunder crackled loudly. Rain began to patter on the roof.

"Norman, you burned the diary, too, didn't you? You were right in doing it, of course. I held it back, because it didn't contain actual spells already laid, only the formulas for them. So in a twisted illogical way I pretended it didn't count. But you did burn it?"

That was harder to answer. He felt as if he were playing a guessing game and Tansy were getting perilously "warm." The thoughts in the sphere buzzed triumphantly: "Mrs. Gunnison has the diary. Now she knows all of Tansy's protective charms."

But he lied, "Yes, I burnt it. I'm sorry, but I thought—"

"Of course," Tansy cut in. "You were quite right." Her fingers played more rapidly with the cord. She did not look down at it.

Lightning showed flashes of pale street and trees through the window. The patter of rain became a pelting. But through it he fancied he heard the scrunch of paws on the drive. Ridiculous—rain and wind were making too much noise.

His eyes were attracted by the pattern of the knots Tansy's restless fingers were weaving. They were complicated, strong-looking knots which fell apart at a single cunning jerk, reminding him of how Tansy had studied assiduously the cat's cradles of the Indians. It also recalled to his mind how knots are used by primitive people, to tie and loose the winds, to hold loved ones, to noose far-off enemies, to inhibit or free all manner of physical and physiological processes. And how the Fates weave destinies like threads. He found something very pleasing in the pattern of the knots and the rhythmic movements which produced them. They seemed to signify security. Until they fell apart.

"Norman"—the voice was preoccupied and rapid—"what was that snapshot you asked Hulda Gunnison to show you last night?"

He felt a brief flurry of panic. She was getting "very warm." This was the stage of the game where you cried out "Hot!"

And then he heard the heavy, unyielding clump-clump on the boards of the front porch, seeming to move questioningly along the wall. The sphere of alien thoughts began to exert an irresistible centrifugal pressure. He felt his sanity being smothered between the assaults from within and without. Very deliberately he shaved off the ash of his cigarette against the edge of the tray.

"It was a picture of the roof of Estrey," he said casually. "Gunnison told me Hulda had taken a number of pictures of that sort. I wanted to see a sample."

"Some sort of creature in it, wasn't there?" Knots flickered into being and vanished with bewildering speed. It seemed to him suddenly that more than twine was being manipulated, and more than empty air tied and loosed. As if the knots were somehow creating an influence, as an electric current along a twisted wire creates a complex magnetic field.

"No," he said, and then made himself chuckle, "unless you count in a stray cement dragon or two." He watched the rippling twine. At times it seemed to glitter, as if there were a metal strand in it.

If ordinary cords and knots, magically employed, could control winds, what would a part-metal cord control? Lightning?

THUNDER RIPPED AND CRASHED DEAFENINGLY. Lightning might have struck in the neighborhood. Tansy did not move a muscle. "That was a Lulu," Norman started to say. Then, as the thunder crash trailed off in rumblings and there was a second's lull in the rain, he heard the sound of something leaping heavily down from the front porch toward the large low window, behind him.

He got to his feet and managed to take a few steps toward the

window, as if to look out at the storm. As he passed Tansy's chair he saw that her rippling fingers were creating a strange knot resembling a flower, with seven loops for petals. She stared like a sleep walker. Then he was between her and the window, shielding her.

The next lightning flash showed him what he knew he must see. It crouched, facing the window. The head was still blank and crude as an unfinished skull.

In the ensuing surge of blackness, the sphere of alien thoughts expanded instantly, until it occupied his entire mind.

He glanced behind him. Tansy's hands were still. The strange seven-looped knot poised between them.

Just as he was turning back, he saw the hands jerk apart and the loops whip in like a seven-fold snare—and hold.

And in that same moment of turning he saw the street brighten like day and a great ribbon of lightning split the tall elm opposite and fork into several streams which streaked across the street toward the window and the stony form upreared against it.

Then—blinding light, and a tingling electrical surge through his whole body.

But on his retina was burned the incandescent track of the lightning, whose multiple streams, racing toward the upreared stony form, had converged upon it as if drawn together by a seven-fold knot.

The sphere of alien thoughts expanded beyond his skull at a dizzy rate, vanished.

His gasping, uncontrollable laughter rose above the dying reverberations of the titanic thunder blast. He dragged open the window, pulled a bridge lamp up to it, jerked the cover from the lamp so its light flooded outward.

"Look, Tansy!" he called, his words mixed with the manic laughter. "Look what those crazy students have done! Those frat men, I bet, I kidded in class. Look what they dragged down from campus and stuck in our front yard. Of all the crazy things—we'll have to call Buildings and Grounds to take it away tomorrow."

Rain splattered in his face. There was a sulphurous, metallic odor. Her hand touched his shoulder. She stared out blankly, her eyes asleep.

It stood there, propped against the wall, solid and inert as only the inorganic can be. In some places the cement darkened and fused.

"And of all mad coincidences," he gasped, "the lightning had to go and strike it."

On an impulse, he reached out his hand and touched it. At the feel of the rough, unyielding surface, still hot from the lightning flash, his laughter died.

"*Eppur si muove*," he murmured to himself, so low that even Tansy, standing beside him, might not have hear. "*Eppur si muove*."

(continued next issue)



USURP THE NIGHT

ROBERT E. HOWARD

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MARJORY WAS CRYING over the loss of Bozo, her fat Maltese who had failed to appear after his usual nightly prowling. There had been a peculiar epidemic of feline disappearances in the neighborhood recently, and Marjory was disconsolate. And because I never could stand to see Marjory cry, I sallied forth in search of the missing pet, though I had little hope of finding him. Every so often some human pervert gratifies his sadistic mania by poisoning animals of which people are fond, and I was certain that Bozo and the score or more of his kind which had vanished in the past few months had fallen victims to some such degenerate.

Leaving the lawn of the Ash

home, I crossed several vacant weed-grown lots and came to the last house on that side of the street—a rundown, rambling estate which had recently been occupied, though not rejuvenated, by a Mr. Stark, a lonely, retiring sort of a man from the East. Glancing at the rambling old house, rising among the great oak trees and set back a hundred yards or so from the street, it occurred to me that Mr. Stark might possibly be able to cast some light on the present mystery.

I turned into the sagging, rusty iron gate and went up the cracked walk, noting the general dilapidation of the place. Little was known about the owner, and though he had been a neighbor of mine for

some six months, I had never seen him at close range. It was rumored that he lived alone, even without servants, though he was a cripple. An eccentric scholar of taciturn nature and with money to indulge his whims, was the general opinion.

The wide porch, half covered with ivy, crossed the whole front of the house and flanked both sides. As I prepared to lift the old-fashioned door knocker, I heard a limping, dragging step and turned to face the owner of the house who came hobbling about the corner of the porch. He was a striking figure, despite his deformity. His face was that of an ascetic and a thinker, with a high magnificent forehead, heavy black brows that almost met, and shaded deep dark eyes, piercing and magnetic. His nose was thin and highbridged, hooked like the beak of some bird of prey, his lips were thin and firmly set, his jaw massive and jutting, almost brutal in its lines of uncompromising resolution. He was not a tall man, even had he stood erect, but his thick short neck and massive shoulders promised power denied by his posture. For he moved slowly and with apparent difficulty, leaning on a crutch, and I saw that one leg was drawn up in an abnormal way, and on the foot he wore a shoe such as is worn on a club-foot.

He looked at me inquiringly and

I said, "Good morning, Mr. Stark, sorry to have troubled you. I'm Michael Strang. I live in the last house on the other side of the street. I just dropped in to learn if you'd seen anything of a big Maltese cat recently."

His eyes bored into me.

"What makes you think I know anything about a cat?" he asked in a deep-timbred voice.

"Nothing," I confessed, feeling rather foolish. "It's my fiancée's cat, though, and she's broken-hearted over losing it. As you're her closest neighbor on this side, I thought there was a bare chance that you might have seen the animal."

"I understand," he smiled pleasantly. "No, I'm very sorry, but I can't help you. I heard some cats caterwauling among my trees last night—in fact, I heard them too distinctly, for I had one of my spells of insomnia—but I've seen nothing of the cat you mention. I am sorry to hear of its loss. Won't you come in?"

RATHER CURIOUS to know more of my neighbor, I accepted his invitation and he showed me into a study redolent of tobacco and book leather. I glanced curiously at the volumes which lined the walls to the ceiling, but had no opportunity to examine their titles, as my host proved surprisingly talkative. He seemed glad of my call and I knew that his visitors

were very rare, if any at all. I found him a highly cultured man, a charming conversationalist, and a most courteous host. He produced whiskey-and-soda from an antique lacquered cabinet whose door seemed to consist of a highly-polished, solid silver plate, and as we sipped our drinks he talked of various subjects in a most interesting manner. Learning from a chance remark that I was deeply interested in the anthropological researches of Professor Hendryk Brooler, he discussed the subject at some length and clarified several points on which I was extremely hazy.

Fascinated by the man's evident erudition, it was nearly an hour before I could tear myself away, though I felt exceedingly guilty when I thought of poor Marjory waiting for news of the missing Bozo. I took my departure, promising to return soon, and as I went out the front door it occurred to me that, after all, I had learned nothing about my host. He had carefully kept the conversation in impersonal channels. I also decided that though he knew nothing about Bozo, the presence of a cat in the house might be an advantage. Several times as we talked, I heard the scampering of something overhead, though on second thought the noise had not particularly resembled the movements of rodents. It had sounded more like

a tiny kid or lamb, or some other small hoofed animal, walking across the floor.

A thorough search of the neighborhood revealing no trace of the missing Bozo, I reluctantly returned to Marjory, bearing, as a partial consolation, a waddling, bench-legged bulldog with a face like a gargoyle and as loyal a heart as ever beat in a canine breast. Marjory wept over the lost cat and christened her new vassal Bozo in memory of the departed, and I left her romping with him on the lawn as if she had been ten instead of twenty.

The memory of my conversation with Mr. Stark remained very vivid in my mind and I visited him again next week. Again I was impressed with the deep and varied knowledge which was his. I purposely led the conversation into many different channels, and in each he showed himself master of the subject, going a little deeper into each than I had ever heard anyone go. Science, the arts, economics, philosophy: he was equally versed in all of them. Charmed as I was by his flow of conversation, I nevertheless found myself listening for the curious noise I had heard before, and I was not disappointed. Only this time the tapping sound was louder than before and I decided that his unknown pet was growing. Perhaps, I thought, he kept it in the house fearing it would meet the same fate as the

vanished cats, and as I knew the house had no basement or cellar, it was natural that he would keep it in some attic room. A lonely and friendless man, it was probable that he felt a great deal of affection for it, whatever it might be.

We talked late into the night, and indeed, it was nearing dawn before I forced myself to take my leave. As before, he urged me to repeat the visit soon. He apologized for his inability to return my call, as he said his infirmity prevented his doing more than limp about his estate for a little exercise early in the morning before the heat of the day set in.

I promised to call again soon, but in spite of my desire to do so, business prevented me for some weeks, during which time I became aware of one of those minor neighborhood mysteries which occasionally spring up in some restricted locality, usually to die away unsolved. Dogs, hitherto unmolested by the unknown destroyer of the cats, now began to vanish likewise and their owners were in constant fury.

MARJORY PICKED ME up in her little roadster as I was walking up from town, and I knew something had occurred to upset her. Bozo, her constant companion, grinned dragonisly at me and jovially lapped my face with a long wet tongue.

"Somebody tried to kidnap

Bozo last night, Michael," she said, her deep dark eyes shadowed with worry and indignation. "I just bet it was the horrid beast who's been doing away with people's pets—"

She gave me the details and it appeared that the mysterious prowler had found Bozo too much of a handful. The family had heard a sudden uproar late in the night, and the sound of a savage struggle, mingled with the maddened roaring of the big dog. They sallied forth and arrived at Bozo's kennel, just too late to apprehend the visitor whose sounds of flight they distinctly heard. The dog was straining his chain, his eyes blazing, every hair on his body standing on end, and his deep throat thundering his defiance. But of the attacker there was no trace; he had evidently broken away and escaped over the high garden wall.

I think the incident must have made Bozo suspicious toward strangers, for it was only the next morning that I was called on to rescue Mr. Stark from him.

As I have said, the Stark house was the last one on his side of the street, and mine was the last on the street, lying some three hundred yards from the lower corner of Stark's wide, tree-covered lawn. On the other corner that faced the street—the corner toward the Ash home—there stood a grove of small trees in one of the vacant lots which separated the Stark estate from the Ash place. As I

was passing this grove on my way to the Ash home, I heard a sudden outcry—a man's voice shouting for help and the infuriated snarling of a dog.

Plunging through the clump I saw a huge dog leaping repeatedly up at a figure which clung to the lower branches of one of the trees. The dog was Bozo and the man was Mr. Stark, who, in spite of his crippled condition, had managed to scramble up into the tree just out of reach. Horrified and astounded, I sprang to the rescue and hauled Bozo away from his intended victim with some difficulty and sent him sulkily homeward. I sprang to assist Mr. Stark out of the tree, and hardly had he touched the earth when he collapsed completely.

However, I could find no sign of injury on him, and he breathlessly assured me—between gasps—that he was quite all right except for the shock of fright and exhaustion. He said that he was resting in the shade of the grove, having tired himself by too long a walk about his estate, when the dog suddenly appeared and attacked him. I apologized profusely for Bozo, assured him it would not happen again, and helped him to his study where he reclined on a divan and sipped a whiskey-and-soda which I prepared for him from ingredients found in the conquered cabinet. He was very reasonable about the matter, as-

sured me that no harm had been done, and attributed the attack to the fact that he was a stranger to the dog.

Suddenly, as he talked, I again heard the tap-tap of hoofs upstairs, and I was startled; the sound was so much heavier than before, though somewhat muffled. It was such a sound as a yearling might make walking about over a rug-covered floor. My curiosity was so much aroused I could hardly keep from inquiring as to the source of the noise, but naturally refrained from such presumption, and feeling that Mr. Stark needed rest and quiet, I left as soon as he was comfortable.

IT WAS ABOUT A WEEK LATER that the first of the blood-chilling mysteries took place. Again it was an unexplained disappearance, but this time it was no cat or dog. It was a three-year-old tot who was seen playing in a lot near its own yard just before sun-down, and was seen no more by mortal eyes. No need to say that the town was up in alarm. Some people had thought to see a malevolent meaning behind the disappearance of the animals, and now this pointed indisputably to some sinister hand working out of sight.

The police scoured town and country, but no trace of the missing child was found, and before the fortnight was over, four more

had vanished in various parts of the city. Their families received no letters demanding ransom, no sign of any hidden enemy taking his revenge. The silence simply yawned and swallowed the victims and remained unbroken. Frantic people appealed to the civil authorities in vain, since they had done all they could and were as helpless as the public.

There was talk of asking the governor to send soldiers to patrol the city, and men began to go armed and to hasten back to their families long before nightfall. Dark whispers of supernatural agencies began to make the rounds, and folk said forebodingly that no mortal man could so snatch away children and remain unsuspected and unknown. But there was no insurmountable mystery in their abducting. It was impossible to patrol every inch of a large city and to keep an eye always on every child. They played in the lonely parks and stayed out until after dusk at work or play; despite warnings and commands, and ran home through the gathering darkness. It was no supernatural thing for the unknown kidnapper, skulking in the shadows, to reach an arm from among the trees or bushes of park or playground and snatch a child strayed from its playmates. Even on lonely streets and dim back-alleys the thing could be done. The horror lay, not so much in the method of

stealing, but in the fact that they were stolen. No sane or normal motive seemed to lie behind it all. An aura of fear hung like a pall over the city, and through this pall shot and icy wave of shuddering horror.

In one of the more secluded parks near the outskirts of the city, a young couple, indulging in what is popularly known as a "petting party," were frozen by a terrible scream from a black clump of trees, and not daring to move, saw a stooped and shadowy figure emerge, bearing on its back the unmistakable body of a man. The horror vanished among the trees, and the couple, frenzied with terror, started their auto and raced wildly for the lights of town. They tremblingly gasped out their story to the chief of police and in a short time a cordon of patrolmen had been thrown about the park. But it was too late; the unknown murderer had made good his—or its—escape. In the grove from which the slayer had been seen to emerge was found a disreputable old hat, crumpled and blood-stained, and one of which had been worn by a vagabond picked up by him the day before and subsequently released. The wretch must have been sleeping in the park when doom fell upon him.

But no other clue was found. The hard springy soil and thick grass gave up no footprint, and the mystery was as much a mystery as ever. And now the fear that hung

over the whole city grew almost unbearable in its intensity. I often thought of Mr. Stark, living alone and crippled in that sombre old house, practically isolated, and often feared for him. I made it a point to drop by his place almost every day to assure myself that he was safe. These visits were very brief. Mr. Stark seemed preoccupied, and though he was affable enough, I felt it better not to intrude myself upon him. I did not, indeed, enter his house at all during this period, as I invariably found him hobbling about the lawn or reclining in a hammock between two great oak trees. Either his infirmity was troubling him more than usual, or the horrid mystery which hung over the town had affected him likewise. He seemed tired most of the time, and his eyes were deeply shadowed as if from mental stress or physical weariness.

A FEW DAYS AFTER the disappearance of the tramp, the city authorities warned all citizens to be on their guard, as, calculating from past events, it was feared that the unknown killer would strike again soon, possibly that night. The police force had been increased to nearly twice its regular number, and a score of citizens were sworn in as special deputies. Grim-faced men patrolled the streets heavily armed, and as night fell, a suffocating tension settled

over the whole city.

It was shortly after dark when my telephone rang. It was Stark.

"I wonder if you'd mind coming over," he said, and his voice sounded rather apologetic. "My cabinet door is jammed and I can't get it open. I wouldn't have bothered you, but it's too late to get a workman here to open it—all the shops are closed. My sleeping powders are in the cabinet, and if I can't get them, I'll spend a wretched night; I feel all the symptoms of an attack of insomnia."

"I'll be right over," I promised.

A brisk walk took me to his door, where he let me in with much apologies.

"I'm frightfully sorry to have caused you all this trouble," he said, "but I haven't the physical strength to pry the door open, and without my sleeping powders, I'd toss and tumble the whole night through."

There were no electric wiring in his house, but several large candles on the table shed sufficient light. I bent before the lacquered cabinet and began to wrestle with the door. I have mentioned the silver plate of which the door appeared to be made. As I worked my gaze fell on this plate which was so highly polished it reflected objects like a mirror. And suddenly my blood chilled. Over my shoulder I saw the reflected countenance of John Stark, unfamiliar and hideously distorted. He held

a mallet in his hand which he lifted as he stealthily approached me. I rose suddenly, wheeling to face him. His face was as inscrutable as ever, except for an expression of faint surprise at my abruptness. He extended the mallet.

"Perhaps you might use this," he suggested.

I took it without a word, still keeping my eyes on him, and striking one terrific blow, literally burst the cabinet door open. His eyes widened in surprise, and for a moment we faced each other unspeaking. There was an electric tenseness in the air, then above my head I heard again the clumping of hoofs. And a strange chill, like a nameless fright, stole over me—for I could have sworn that it was nothing smaller than a horse which tramped about in the rooms overhead!

Throwing the mallet aside, I turned without a word and hastened out of the house, nor did I breathe entirely easy until I had gained my own library. There I sat pondering, my mind a chaotic jumble. Had I made a fool of myself? Had not that look of fiendish craft on John Stark's face as he stole up behind me been merely a distortion of reflection? Had my imagination run away with me? Or—and here dark fears whispered at the back of my brain—had the reflection in that silver plate been all that saved my life? Was John Stark a madman? I shook

with a ghastly thought. Was it he who was responsible for the recent detestable crimes? The theory was untenable. What possible reason could a refined, elderly scholar have in abducting children and murdering tramps? Again my fears whispered that there might be a motive—whispered shuddersomely of a ghastly laboratory where a crazed scientist carried out horrible experiments with human specimens.

Then I laughed at myself. Even supposing John Stark to be a madman, the recent crimes were physically beyond his power. Only a man of almost superhuman strength and agility could carry off strong young children soundlessly and bear the corpse of a murdered man on his shoulders. Certainly no cripple could do it, and it was up to me to go back to Mr. Stark's house and apologize for my foolish actions. And then a sudden thought struck me like a dash of ice-cold water—something which at the time had impressed itself on my subconscious mind, but which I had not consciously noticed. When I had turned to face John Stark before the lacquered cabinet, he had been standing upright, without his crutch.

With a bewildered shake of my head, I dismissed the matter from my mind and, picking up a book, settled myself to read. The volume, selected at random, was

not one calculated to rid my mind of haunting shadows. It was the extremely rare Dusseldorf edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*, called the Black Book, not because of its iron-clasped leather bindings, but because of its dark contents. Opening the volume at random, I began idly to read the chapter on the summoning of daemons out of the Void. More than ever I sensed a deep and sinister wisdom behind the author's incredible assertions as I read of the unseen worlds of unholy dimensions which Von Junzt maintains press, horrific and dimly guessed, on our universe, and of the blasphemous inhabitants of those Outer Worlds, which he maintains at times burst terribly through the Veil at the bidding of evil sorcerers, to blast the brains and feast on the blood of men.

Reading, I drowsed, and from my doze awoke with a cold fear lying upon my soul like a cloud. I had dreamed fitfully and in my dream I had heard Marjory calling to me faintly, as if from across misty and terrible abysses, and in her voice was a blood-freezing fear as if she were menaced by some horror beyond all human understanding. I found myself shaking as with ague and cold sweat stood upon my body as in a nightmare.

TAKING UP THE TELEPHONE, I called up the Ash home. Mrs. Ash answered and I

asked to speak to Marjory.

Her voice came back over the wire tinged with anxiety. "Why, Michael, Marjory has been gone for more than an hour! I heard her talking over the phone, and then she told me you wanted her to meet you by the grove on the corner of the Stark place, to take a ride. I thought it was funny that you didn't drive by the house as you always do, and I didn't like the idea of her going out alone, but I supposed you knew best—you know we always put so much faith in you, Michael—so I let her go. You don't think—you don't think—anything—anything—"

"Oh no!" I laughed, but my laughter was hollow, my throat dry. "Nothing's happened, Mrs. Ash. I'll bring her home, right away."

As I hung up the receiver and turned away, I heard a sound outside the door—a scratching sound accompanied by a low whimper. Such a small thing can be vested with unknown fear at times—my hair prickled and my tongue clove to my palate. Expecting to see I knew not what, I flung open the door. A cry broke from my lips as a dusty, blood-stained shape limped in and staggered against my legs. It was Marjory's dog, Bozo. He had evidently been brutally beaten. One ear was split open and his hide had been bruised and torn in half a dozen places.

He seized my trouser leg and

pulled me toward the door, growling deep in his throat. My mind a seething hell, I prepared to follow him. The thought of a weapon entered my mind, and at the same instant I remembered I had loaned my revolver to a friend who feared to traverse the streets at night unarmed. My gaze fell upon a great broadsword hanging on a battle-field since it first hung at the girdle of a crusading ancestor.

I tore it from the scabbard where it had rested undisturbed for a hundred years and the cold blue steel glimmered unstained in the light. Then I followed the growling dog into the night. He ran staggeringly but swiftly, and I was hard put to keep up with him. He went in the direction my inmost intuition had told me he would go—toward the house of John Stark.

We approached the corner of the Stark estate and I caught Bozo's collar and drew him back, as he started across the crumbling wall. I knew enough. John Stark was the fiend incarnate who had laid the cloud of terror over the city. I recognized the technique—a telephone call which lured the victim forth. I had walked into his trap, but chance had intervened. So he had chosen the girl—it would not be difficult to imitate my voice. Homicidal maniac or crazy experimenter, whatever he might be, I knew that somewhere in that dark house Marjory lay, a cap-

tive or a corpse. And I did not intend that Stark should have the opportunity to shoot me down as I walked in upon him openly. A black fury gripped me, bringing with it the craft that extreme passion often brings. I was going into that dark house, and I was going to hew John Stark's head from his body with the blade that in old times had severed the necks of Saracens and pirates and traitors.

Ordering Bozo to keep behind me, I turned from the street and went swiftly and cautiously along the side wall until I was even with the back part of the house. A glow above the trees to the east warned me that the moon was coming up, and I wished to get into the house before the light might betray me to any watcher. I climbed the tumble-down wall, and with Bozo following me like a shadow, I crossed the lawn, keeping close under the shadows of the trees.

Silence gripped the dark house as I stole up upon the rear porch, my blade ready. Bozo sniffed at the door and whined deep in his throat. I crouched, waiting for anything. I knew not what peril lurked in that mysterious unlighted building, or whether I was daring one lone madmad or a gang of murderers. I lay no claim to courage, but the black rage in my brain swept all thought of personal fear away. I tried the door cautiously. I was not very familiar with the house, but believed the door led

into a store-room. It was locked on the inside. I drove my sword-point between the door and the jamb and pried, carefully but powerfully. There was no such thing as breaking the ancient blade, forged with forgotten craft, and as I exerted all my strength, which is not considerable, something had to give. It was the old-fashioned lock. With a groan and crash that seemed horribly loud in the stillness, the door sagged open.

I STRAINED MY EYES into the utter blackness as I stole forward. Bozo passed me silently and vanished in the gloom. Utter silence reigned, then the clink of a chain sent a chill of nameless fear through me. I swung about, hair bristling, sword lifed—and then I heard the muffled sound of a woman sobbing.

I dared to strike a match. Its flare showed me the great dusty room, piled high with nondescript junk—and showed me a pitiful girlish form crumpled in a corner. It was Marjory, and Bozo was whining and licking her face. Stark was nowhere to be seen, and the one other door leading from the store-room was closed. I stepped to it quickly and slid the old-fashioned bolt. Then I lighted a stump of a candle which I found upon a table, and went quickly to Marjory. Stark might come in upon us unexpectedly through the

outer door, but I trusted to Bozo to warn me of his coming. The dog showed no signs of nervousness or anger to indicate the near presence of a lurking enemy, but now and then he looked up toward the ceiling and growled deep and ominously.

Marjory was gagged and her hands tied behind her. A small chain about her slim waist shackled her to a heavy staple in the wall, but the key was in the lock. I freed her in an instant, and she threw her arms convulsively about me, shaking as with an ague. Her wide dark eyes stared unseeingly into mine with a horror that shook my soul and froze my blood with a nameless grisly premonition.

"Marjory!" I panted, "What in God's name has happened? Don't be afraid. Nothing shall harm you. Don't look like that! In Heaven's name, girl—"

"Listen!" she whispered shuddering. "The tramp—the terrible tramp of the hoofs!"

My head jerked up, and Bozo, every bristle on end, cringed, sheer terror blazing in his eyes. Above our heads sounded the clomping of hoofs. But now the footfalls were gigantic—elephantine. The house trembled to their impact. A cold hand touched my spine.

"What is it, in God's name?" I whispered.

She clung closer to me.

"I don't know! I dare not try to guess! We must go! We must run

away. *It* will come down for us—it will burst *its* prison. For hours I've listened to it—"

"Where is Stark?" I muttered.

"Up—up there!" she shuddered. "I'll tell you quickly—then we must run! I thought your voice sounded strange when you called me up, but I came to meet you, as I thought. I brought Bozo with me because I was afraid to go out in the dark alone. Then when I was in the shadow of the grove, something sprang upon me. Bozo roared and leaped, but he struck him down with a heavy club and struck him again and again as he lay writhing in the dust. All the time I was struggling and trying to scream, but the creature had gripped my throat with a great gorilla-like hand, and I was half-strangled. Then he flung me over his shoulder and carried me through the grove and across the wall into the Stark estate. I was only half-conscious and it was not until he had brought me into this room that I saw it was John Stark. But he did not limp and he moved with the agility of a great ape. He was dressed in dark close-fitting garments which blended so well with the darkness as to render him almost invisible.

"He gagged me while I pleaded in vain for mercy, and bound my hands. Then he chained me to the wall, but left the key in the lock as if he intended taking me away soon. I believe he was mad—and afraid, too. There was an unearthly

blaze in his eyes and his hands shook as with palsy. He said, 'You wonder why I have brought you here? I will tell you, because what you know will not matter anyhow, since within an hour you will be beyond all knowledge!'

"**TOMORROW** THE papers will scream in headlines that the mysterious kidnapper has struck again, under the very noses of the police! Well, they'll soon have more to worry them than an occasional disappearance, I fear. A weaker personality than mine might well feel some vanity in outwitting the authorities as I have done—but it has been so easy to evade the stupid fools. My pride is fed on greater things. I planned well. When I brought the *thing* into being, I knew it would need food—much food. That is why I came out where I was not known and feigned lameness and weakness, I who have the strength of a giant in my thews. None has suspected me—unless it is Michael Strang. Tonight I read doubt in his eyes—I should have struck anyhow, when he turned to face me—should have taken the chance of mortal combat with him, powerful as he is—

"You do not understand. I see in your eyes that you do not understand. But I will try to make you understand. Men think I am deeply cultured; little do they guess how deep my knowledge is. I have

gone further than any man in the arts and sciences. They were toys for paltry brains, I found. I went deeper. I experimented with the occult as some men experiment with science. I found that by certain grim and ancient arts a wise man could tear aside the Veil between the universes and bring unholy shapes into this terrestrial plane. I set to work to prove this thing. You might ask me, why? Why does any scientist make experiments? The proving of the theory is reason enough—the acquiring of knowledge is the end that justifies the means. Your brain would wither and crumble away were I to describe to you the incantations and spells and strange propitiations with which I drew a mewling, squalling, naked *thing* out of the Void.

“It was not easy. For months I toiled and studied, delving deep into the ungodly lores of blasphemous books and musty manuscripts. Groping in the blind dark Outer chasms into which I had projected my bodiless will, I first *felt* the existence and presence of unhallowed beings, and I worked to establish contact with them—to draw one, at least, into this material universe. For long I could only feel *it* touching the dark borderlands of my own consciousness. Then with grim sacrifices and ancient rituals, I drew it across the gulfs. First it was but a vast anthropomorphic shadow

cast upon a wall. I saw its progression from nothingness into the mold and being of this material sphere. I saw when its eyes burned in the shadow, and when the atoms of its nonterrestrial substance swirled and changed and clarified and shrank, and in shrinking, crystallized and became matter as we know it.

“And there on the floor before me lay the mewling, squalling, naked thing from out the Abyss, and when I saw its nature, even I blanched and my resolution almost failed me.

“At first it was no bigger than a toad. But I fed it carefully, knowing that it would thrive only on fresh blood. To begin with I fed it living flies and spiders, insects which draw blood from other things. At first it grew slowly—but it grew. I increased its food. I fed it mice—rats—rabbits, then cats. Finally a full-grown dog was none too large a meal for it.

“I saw where this was leading, but I was determined not to be balked. I stole and gave it a human infant, and after that it would touch no other food. Then for the first time, a thrill of fear touched my soul. The thing began to grow and expand appallingly on its feasts of human blood. I began to fear it. I no longer looked upon it with pride. No longer I delighted in watching it feed upon the prey I caught for it. But now I found I was caught in a trap of my own

making. When even temporarily deprived of its food, the thing grew dangerous to me. It demanded its food oftener; I was forced to take desperate chances to obtain that food.

"Tonight by the barest chance, your lover escaped the fate which has befallen you. I hold Michael Strang no ill-will. Necessity is a cruel taskmaster. I will take no pleasure in laying you, alive and writhing, before the monster, I must continue to gorge it on human blood, lest it take me for its prey. You might ask me, why do I not destroy that which I have created? It is a question I ask myself. I dare not try. I doubt if human hands can slay it. My mind is no longer my own. I, who was once its master, am become no more than a slave to provide it food. Its terrible non-human intelligence has robbed me of my will-power and enslaved me. Come what may, I must continue to feed it!

"It may keep on growing until it bursts its prison and stalks slaver-ing and ravening forth into the world. Each time it has fed of late, it has grown spans in height and girth. There may be no limit to its growth. But I dare not refuse it the good it craves."

"Here he started as the house trembled to the impact of a great lumbering tread somewhere upstairs. He turned pale. 'It has awakened and is hungry!' he hissed.

'I will go to it—tell it it is too soon to be fed!' He took the candle which was burning on the table and hurried away, and I heard him ascend the stairs—" she sunk her face in her hands and a shudder shook her slim frame.

"ONE TERRIBLE SCREAM burst forth," she whimpered, "then silence, save for a hideous rending, crunching sound, and the tramp—tramp—tramp of the terrible hoofs! I lay here—it seemed for ages. Once I heard a dog whining and scratching at the outer door and knew that Bozo had recovered consciousness and followed me here, but I couldn't call to him, and soon he went away—and I lay here alone—listening—listening—"

I shuddered as if a cold wind were blowing upon me from outer space. And I rose, gripping the ancient sword. Marjory sprang up and seized me with convulsive strength.

"Oh, Michael, let us go!"

"Wait!" I was in the grip of an unconquerable depriving urge. "Before I go I must see what hides in those upstairs rooms."

She screamed and clung to me frantically.

"No, no, Michael! Oh, God, you don't know what you're saying! It is some terrible thing not of this earth—some ghastly being from *outside*! Human weapons

cannot harm it. Don't—don't, for my sake, Michael, don't throw away your life!"

I shook my head.

"This is not heroism, Marjory, nor is it mere curiosity. I owe it to the children—to the helpless people of this city. Did not Stark say something about the thing breaking out of its prison? No—I must go against it now, while it is cornered in this house."

"But what can you do with your puny weapon?" she wailed, wrenching her hands.

"I don't know," I answered, "but this I do know—that demoniac lust is no stronger than human hate, and that I will match this blade, which in old days slew witches and warlocks and vampires and werewolves, against the foul legions of Hell itself. Go! Take the dog and run home as fast as you can!"

And in spite of her protests and pleas, I disengaged her clinging arms and pushed her gently out the door, closing it in the face of her despairing wail. Then taking up the candle, I went swiftly into the hallway on which the store-room abutted. The stair showed dark and forbidding, a black well of shadows, and suddenly a faint draught of wind blew out the candle in my hand, and groping in my pockets, I found I had no matches to relight it. But the moon shone faintly through the small highset win-

dows, and in its dim light I went grimly up the dark stairs, driven irresistibly by some force stronger than fear, the sword of my warrior-ancestors gripped in my hands.

All the time overhead, those gargantuan hoofs blundered to and fro and their ponderous fall froze the very blood in my veins, and on my clammy flesh, cold sweat froze. I knew no earthly feet made those sounds. All the dim horror-ridden shadows beyond ancestral fears clawed and whispered at the back of my mind, all the vague phantasmal shapes that lurk in the subconsciousness rose titanic and terrible, all the dim racial memories of grisly prehistoric fears awoke to haunt me. Every reverberation of those lumbering footfalls roused, in the slumbering depths of my soul, horrific, mist-veiled shapes of near-memory. But on I went.

THE DOOR at the head of the stairs was furnished with a snap lock—evidently within as well as without, since after I had drawn back the outer catch, the massive portal still held firm. And within I heard that elephantine tread. In a frenzy, lest my resolution give way to screaming black panic, I heaved up my sword and splintered the panels with three mighty blows. Through the ruins I stepped.

The whole upstairs space con-

sisted of one great room, now faintly illuminated by the moonlight which streamed in through the heavily barred windows. The place was vast and spectral, with bars of white moonlight and floating oceans of shadow. And an involuntary, unhuman cry broke from my dry lips.

Before me stood the Horror. The moonlight illumined vaguely a shape of nightmare and lunacy. Twice as tall as man, its general outline was not unlike that of a human; but its gigantic legs terminated in huge hoofs and instead of arms, a dozen tenacles writhed like snakes about its huge bloated torso. Its color was a leprous, mottled reptilian hue, and the crowning horror came when it turned its loose slaverling blood-stained jowls toward me and fixed me with its sparkling million-faceted eyes which glittered like bits of fire. There was nothing of the human about that pointed, malformed head—and God help me, there was nothing of the bestial either, as human beings understand the beasts. Tearing my eyes from that grisly head for the sake of my sanity, I was aware of another horror, intolerable in its unmistakable implication. About those giant hoofs lay the dismembered and fang-torn fragments of a human body, and a bar of moonlight fell upon the severed head which lay staring upward with glassy dead eyes of horror

—the head of John Stark.

Fear can become so intense it defeats itself. Now as I stood frozen, and out of that shambles the ghastly fiend came lumbering toward me, my fear was swept away by a red blaze of berserker fury. Swinging up my sword I leaped to meet the horror and the whistling blade sheared off half its tentacles, which fell to the floor, writhing like serpents.

With an abhorrent high-pitched squeal, the monster bounded high above my head and stamped terribly downward. The impact of those frightful hoofs shattered my upflung arm like matchwood and dashed me to the floor, and with a soul-shaking bellow of triumph the monster leaped ponderously upon me in a ghastly deathdance that made the whole building groan and sway. Somehow I twisted aside and escaped those thunderous hoofs, that else had hammered me into a red pulp, and rolling aside, gained my feet, one thought uppermost in my mind—drawn from the shapeless void and materialized into concrete substance, the fiend was vulnerable to material weapons. And with my one good hand I gripped the sword that a saint had blessed in old times against the powers of darkness, and the red wave of battle-lust surged over me.

The monster wheeled unwieldily toward me, and roaring a wordless warcry I leaped, whirling the

great sword through the air with every ounce of my powerful frame behind it. And straight through the pulpy unstable bulk it sheared, so that the loathsome torso fell one way and the giant legs the other. I swung up my sword and struck again and again, hacking the monstrosity into bits, each of which squirmed and writhed as if endowed with separate life—until I had hewed the head into pieces, and then I saw the scattered bits changing in form and substance. There seemed to be no bones in the thing's body.

AND NOW as I watched, I saw the fragments *melt* into a viscous black stenching fluid which flowed over the fragments of what had been John Stark. And in that black tide those fragments of flesh and bone crumbled and dissolved, as salt melts in water, faded and vanished—became one with the black abhorrent pool which whirled and eddied in the center of the room, showing a million facets and gleams of light, like the burning eyes of a myriad huge spiders. And I turned and fled downstairs.

At the foot of the stairs I stumbled over a soft heap, and a familiar whine woke me from the mazes of unutterable horror

into which I had fallen. Marjory had not obeyed me; she had returned to that house of horror. She lay at my feet in a dead faint, and Bozo stood faithfully over her. Aye, I doubt not, if I had lost that grim battle, he would have given up his life to save his mistress when the monster came lurching down the stairs. With a sob of horror I caught up the girl, crushing her limp form to me; then Bozo cringed and snarled, gazing up the moon-flecked stairs. And down these stairs I saw a black glittering tide flowing sluggishly.

I ran from that house as I would flee from Hell, but I halted in the old store-room long enough to sweep a hasty hand over the table where I had found the candles. Several burnt matches littered the table, but I found one unstruck. And I struck it hurriedly and tossed it blazing into a heap of dusty papers near the wall. The wood was old and dry; it caught quickly and burned fiercely.

And as, with Marjory and Bozo, I watched it burn, I at least knew what the awakened townspeople did not guess; that the horror which had hovered over the city and the countryside was vanishing in those flames—I most devoutly hope, forever. □

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